

Italian premier denies plans to expel Ocalan

ROME (AP) — Italy's premier on Wednesday denied reports that his centre-left government was involved in negotiations to send Turkish Kurdish rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan to a third country, saying the leader was free to go where he pleased. Italian and Turkish newspapers in recent days have been filled with reports claiming Ocalan, whose detention here Nov. 27 created an international incident, was about to be kicked out of Italy. The list of countries mentioned include Estonia, South Africa, Libya, Pakistan and South Africa. But Premier Massimo D'Alema said a ruling by Rome's appeals court last week to lift all restrictions on Ocalan made him free to choose his own destiny.

Jordan Times

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Merry Christmas

THE JORDAN TIMES will not be published on Saturday, Dec. 26 because of the Christmas holiday. The next issue of the paper will appear on Sunday, Dec. 27. On this occasion, the Jordan Times wishes its readers and advertisers a Merry Christmas.

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Price: Jordan 200 fils

Crown Prince hosts iftar

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Wednesday held an iftar banquet at Al Hussein Youth City in honour of representatives of the government of Amman, Balqa, Zarqa and Madaba. Royal family members, Senate President Zeid Rifai, Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali, Royal Court Chief Jawad Anani, several of His Majesty King Hussein's advisors and other senior officials attended the banquet.

ADC protests bomb graffiti

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A leading U.S. Arab group called on the U.S. military Wednesday to discipline soldiers who scrawled disparaging graffiti on missiles dropped on Iraq during Operation Desert Fox. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) called for an investigation into the incident, alleging it was indicative of widespread "anti-Arab bigotry" in the U.S. armed forces. The slogans such as "Die, You Magots" (sic), "This is Guma (sic) Hurt" and "To Saddam, Mery (sic) Xmas" were evidence of a "culture of racism in the military towards Arabs," the committee said in a statement. It lambasted the Pentagon's failure to launch an inquiry into the incident and called for a thorough investigation and a programme of "sensitivity training for military personnel." In a statement issued Tuesday, the Pentagon repudiated the graffiti, which it said was "thoughtless" and unrepresentative of U.S. soldiers.

Palestinian held for killing settlers escapes from prison

NABLUS (AFP) — A Palestinian arrested two months ago for the murders of two Jewish settlers has escaped from a Palestinian prison here. Palestinian security sources said Wednesday, Jamil Jadal, who confessed to carrying out the attacks, escaped from a Nabulus prison on Monday, taking advantage of a relaxation of security during the traditional evening fast-breaking meal during the month of Ramadan. Jadal, originally from Hebron, is accused of killing two Jewish settlers in the West Bank city, one in August and one in October. He has said he carried out the attacks on his own personal initiative.

BBC Gulf air strikes coverage irks Downing Street

LONDON (AFP) — Downing Street admitted Wednesday that British ministers had complained to the BBC about its coverage of air strikes against Iraq. A spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Blair said that Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, Defence Secretary George Robertson and Blair's spokesman Alastair Campbell had spoken to British Broadcasting Corporation officials. The main complaint was that BBC correspondents in Baghdad were not making it clear that their reports had been censored by Iraq. But a BBC spokesman denied the allegations and said the correspondents had been regularly given this warning. He said no official complaint had been made by the government. The Guardian newspaper said Blair was furious and felt the BBC put too much emphasis on the sufferings of the Iraqi people.

Iraq bans U.N. flights as relief workers assess bomb damage

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Baghdad slapped a ban on all U.N. flights Wednesday for the first time since the 1991 Gulf war as relief workers evacuated during the latest U.S.-led air strikes on Iraq began assessing the bomb damage.

"We have been informed by the Iraqi authorities of their decision to cancel all U.N. flights" to and from Iraq, a U.N. official told AFP.

The ban emerged after Iraq refused to allow a U.N. aircraft to land at Baghdad's Habbaniyah military airport to take U.N. special representative Prakash Shah to Bahrain, the rear base for U.N. staff.

"We reached this decision to guarantee the safety of the U.N. plane and to prevent it from being caught between the American air force and the Iraqi anti-aircraft fire," said foreign ministry under-secretary Nuri Ismail Al Wais.

Iraq accused "enemy" warplanes of firing missiles on its southern territory Tuesday, but both Britain and the United States denied there had been any incident.

The flight ban was likely to heighten the antagonism between the United Nations and Iraq over sanctions and weapons inspections only days after Britain and the United States called a halt to Operation Desert Fox.

Shah and U.N. humanitarian

programme coordinator Hans von Sponeck, who had both remained in Baghdad with a skeleton crew during the air strikes, had to leave by road for Amman for their 10-day Christmas holiday.

Despite the flight ban, U.N. relief workers returned to work Wednesday to weigh up the damage done to the U.N.'s oil-for-food programme by the military offensive, which ended in the early hours of Sunday.

Around 100 staff arrived at midnight after a 15-hour overland journey from Jordan and workers will be assessing the damage caused to the programme in their absence, said a U.N. spokesman in Baghdad, Khalid Al Izzi.

The scheme was launched in December 1996 and allows Iraq to sell \$5.2 billion in oil every six months to buy food and medicine for its 22 million people. Deliveries of basic supplies resumed on Tuesday after being suspended during Desert Fox.

Benon Sevan, the programme's executive director, has called for U.N. agencies to make a "rapid and detailed evaluation of the damage and of any urgent needs," he said.

But Iraq said it no longer wanted foreign aid donations.

"We are no longer able to accept humanitarian donations and we call on Arab and for-

Security Council fails to agree Iraq text

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — A disagreement between Russia and the U.S. on the role of the U.N. chief prevented the U.N. Security Council from reaching consensus on an Iraq statement Wednesday. The U.S. delegation submitted amendments to a Russian draft statement which notably ruled out any disarmament role for the U.N. secretary-general. Russian deputy permanent representative Yuri Fedotov admitted to reporters after a closed-door council meeting that "one of the problems is that the role of the secretary-general is somehow limited and confined to the humanitarian aspect of the situation." He said that his delegation may put forward a new version of the draft statement as early as Thursday. A formal statement requires consensus among all 15 council members to be adopted.

eign donors to campaign for a lifting of the embargo," Al Wais said.

The United States has held out the prospect of an enhancement of the oil-for-food scheme, but insisted Iraq must allow the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) to resume its work verifying the dismantling of weapons of mass destruction.

"There is a possibility of expanding it if the [U.N.] secretary general and his experts believe there is a need for expansion," Thomas Pickering, the State Department's point man on Iraq, said Tuesday.

But the United States also threatened to use its veto in the Security Council to block any

easing of the embargo imposed on Iraq after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait that triggered the Gulf war. "If it doesn't permit UNSCOM to come back, then it has selected sanctions in perpetuity," Pickering said.

But Iraq is refusing to allow UNSCOM to return after a report by its chairman Richard Butler found Baghdad had failed to cooperate with inspectors, triggering Desert Fox.

The United States and Britain are entirely responsible for the aggression and the Security Council is urged to bring them to account, to condemn them and demand compensation for human and material losses," wrote Al Thawra, the ruling Baath party newspaper.



An Iraqi soldier stands in front of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad on Wednesday as U.N. humanitarian staff members headed back to work after being evacuated last week from Iraq's bombed capital Baghdad during Operation Desert Fox (AFP photo)

Arab deputies to meet Sunday on Iraq

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The Arab Parliamentary Union will hold an emergency meeting in Amman Sunday to discuss last week's U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq.

Abdul Hadi Majali, speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, said Wednesday the extraordinary gathering would discuss "the U.S.-British aggression" on Iraq over

its reported failure to cooperate with U.N. arms inspectors and effective ways to support Baghdad.

"His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, will preside over the one-day meeting," he added.

The gathering comes only days after Jordanian deputies called on members of other Arab parliaments to work towards ending the Iraqi people's suffering following the

punitive strikes on Iraq, which angered many in the Arab World.

Majali said he sent a letter on Monday to the head of the APU, Ahmad Fathi Srour, informing him about the Jordanian Parliament's position, and also telephoned several Arab parliament presidents stressing the need for deputies in the Arab World to reflect the people's sentiments and work towards ending Iraq's plight.

The Lower House Sunday had passed a non-binding resolution demanding unilateral lifting of the U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after it invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and expelling the envoys of the United States, Britain and Israel.

During Sunday's heated session, Majali led 53 deputies in condemning the strikes against Iraq.

(Continued on page 12)



Lebanese citizens chant slogans against Israel and the U.S. as they carry coffins during a mass funeral in the Lebanese eastern city of Baalbek on Wednesday (Reuters photo)

5,000 attend funeral of Lebanese family killed by Israeli air raid

BAALBEK (AFP) — Some 5,000 angry mourners attended the funeral here Wednesday of a Lebanese woman and her six children killed in an Israeli air raid as Hizbollah threatened U.S. citizens to avenge their deaths.

Nadwa Othman, 35, and her six children, aged one to 16, were killed in the Bekaa valley Monday when an Israeli missile slammed into the farmhouse where they were staying in Janta, five kilometres from the Syrian border.

"Death to Israel. Death to the United States, the Great Satan," the crowd chanted, beating their chests.

Mourners in both Western and Islamic dress broke out in tears as the cortege passed, and sprayed the coffins of the children with rice, flowers and rosewater — normally a marriage custom — to underscore the youth of the victims.

The Israeli army has acknowledged that the woman and children were

SLA man killed

MARJAYOUN (AFP) — An "officer" in the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) was killed Wednesday in an attack by Hizbollah guerrillas. SLA sources said. The SLA militiaman was killed when a bomb exploded near his home in the village of Annan, in the predominantly Christian Jezzine area of southern Lebanon, the sources said. A Hizbollah spokesman in Beirut claimed responsibility for an attack against an SLA patrol.

killed because of an "error" and said the Israeli aircraft were aiming at a Hizbollah training camp.

Sheikh Mobammad Yuzbek, the Lebanese representative of Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei and an official in the Shiite Muslim Hizbollah — which had been the target of the Israeli raid — delivered a fiery speech packed with veiled threats against the United States.

He said "the American people should disavow their leaders," and that if they did not the Hizbollah would consider them responsible, along with the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton, for the deaths.

"Bill Clinton, the sex pervert, is as responsible as [Israeli Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu," he said, referring to Clinton's impeachment over his affair with a White House intern.

"Until now we've made the distinction between the American people and its criminal administration. But if the American people do not disavow their administration, we will consider that they are equally responsible for the murder of our children," he said.

(Continued on page 12)

Plan to fight poverty, joblessness launched

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government has launched the first phase of a social safety package designed to deal with Jordan's twin dilemmas of soaring poverty and rising unemployment.

Announcing the start of the long-delayed plan, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh said the package was being implemented at this time because sufficient funds have been secured for the different projects included in the initial phase of the plan.

Tarawneh, meeting Tuesday evening with the ministerial committee entrusted with dealing with the execution of the plan, instructed the concerned departments, particularly the radio and television, to highlight the details of the package and help spread public awareness of its importance for targeted groups.

The prime minister also stressed the need for the National Aid Fund (NAF), the Zakat Fund, and the Queen Alia Social Welfare Fund (QAF), among the different non-governmental organisations, to play a leading role and pool their efforts towards ensuring the success of the plan in various government sectors.

The plan, which initially was estimated to cost JD 430

million, aims to improve the social and economic conditions of the underprivileged in the country, to upgrade infrastructure services and create jobs through income-generating projects, said Minister of Planning Nabil Amman.

Under the first stage of the plan, which is expected to last three years, the government intends to expand the activities of the NAF, while the second stage entails creating job opportunities through job training programmes in areas required by the local labour market.

He said the third stage will focus on granting loans to small size income-generating projects to help combat poverty and unemployment.

The minister said the plan will be implemented by a number of Jordanian governmental and non-governmental institutions, which among others include the Cities and Villages Development Bank, the Housing Bank and the Housing and Urban Development Corporation.

The ministerial committee had earlier said the German and Japanese governments and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development have contributed money for the implementation of the plan.

PNA lifts Sheikh Yassin house arrest

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority lifted the two-month house arrest of Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin on Wednesday, prompting swift condemnation from Israel.

After attending prayers at his local mosque Sheikh Yassin told AFP that his release was a step towards Palestinian unity and stressed the struggle against Israel would go on.

"This is a step in the right direction. All Palestinian people should be united to face our enemy. If we are not united we will lose the fight to our enemy," Yassin said.

"We are now looking to free all our people in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) jails and also in Israeli jails," he said.

"We are not terrorists, we don't attack anyone, we are asking for our rights. We will continue with our struggle," he said.

David Bar-Ilan, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said the move was proof of a lax Palestinian attitude toward terrorism.

"This points to the revolving door policy as far as terrorists are concerned," he said.

The Palestinian National Security Council, headed by Yasser Arafat and comprised

of the heads of the various police forces, agreed to his release, a move that had been recommended by the central committee of Arafat's Fatah faction, said a Palestinian official who asked not to be named.

Hamas leader Ismail Abu Shanab said the Palestinian policemen who had been guarding Sheikh Yassin's home dismantled the checkpoint that prevented access to his house and were no longer in the area.

Sheikh Yassin, the 62-year-old Hamas founder and spiritual leader, had been under house arrest since the Wye River peace accord was signed in late October. Hamas is opposed to Arafat's peace deals with Israel.

While under house arrest Sheikh Yassin, who is nearly blind and confined to a wheelchair, was not allowed contact with journalists and his telephone was cut off.

He was freed from an Israeli jail last year after serving an eight-year sentence.

Hamas has claimed responsibility for scores of suicide bombings that have left dozens of Israelis dead.

On Dec. 11, the military wing of Hamas threatened to resume its attacks on Israel if the did not end the house arrest before Dec. 25.

Cyprus welcomes U.N. resolutions as positive

NICOSIA (AP) — Cyprus welcomed Wednesday two U.N. Security Council resolutions that suggested a new impetus toward its call for disarmament and negotiations on the war-divided island.

In Athens, Greek Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos also greeted the resolutions as showing that the world body realised "the dangers contained in a prolongation of the problem."

In its late Tuesday session, the council renewed the mandate of the 2,500-member U.N. peacekeeping force which patrols a buffer zone between the Turkish-occupied north of the island and the Greek-dominated south.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded after a short-lived coup by supporters of union with Greece. A breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in the north is recognised only by Turkey, which maintains 35,000 troops there.

The council called the status quo "unacceptable" and said "negotiations on a final political solution of the Cyprus problem have been at an impasse for too long."

It demanded compliance with U.N. resolutions that call for a reduction of troops and weapons and the island's reunification.

Briefing reporters Wednesday, Cypriot Foreign Minister Yiannakis Cassoulides said: "This is the first time in many years that the Security Council demands compliance with its previous resolutions on Cyprus, particularly with regard to refraining from the threat or the use of force, and on the reduction of troops and armaments."

"This gives emphasis to what is important for us," he added.

Cassoulides also welcomed a statement by U.S. President Bill Clinton Tuesday in which he undertook to "take all necessary steps to support a sustained effort" for the implementation of the council's resolutions.

In Athens, Pangalos praised Clinton's comments, but he added that the United States should "ask Turkey to immediately withdraw the American weapons systems in [northern Cyprus]."

Tension has been rising on the island recently following Turkish threats to prevent the planned deployment by Cyprus of Russian S-300 anti-aircraft missiles. Greece said it will support Cyprus if it is attacked in line with their joint defence agreement.

The resolutions did not mention the missiles, but the council expressed "its grave concern at the continuing excessive levels of military force and armaments in the

Republic of Cyprus and the rate at which they are being expanded."

Cyprus has been under strong pressure from the United States and the European Union to cancel the missiles' deployment.

President Glafcos Clerides, the Greek Cypriot leader, maintains he is ready to do so, provided there is progress toward peace negotiations and the demilitarisation of the island.

Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş walked out of the U.N. talks in August 1997, demanding recognition of his breakaway state and cancellation of the Cypriot accession negotiations with the European Union.

Cyprus hints S-300s may not be deployed

NICOSIA (AFP) — Cyprus announced Wednesday a meeting of its National Council Thursday to discuss the deployment of controversial S-300 missiles amid indications that they may not be put in place here after all.

"Various factors are now coming together and will be put before the National Council for the appropriate appraisal," Foreign Minister Yiannakis Cassoulides said.

The top presidential advisory body on Cyprus's division will "discuss and decide on" the fate of the Russian-made missiles, which Turkey has threatened to knock out if they are deployed, he said.

Cassoulides, elaborating on the "various factors," said the U.N. Security Council's two resolutions on Cyprus Tuesday were "considered positive."

"We believe they create hope of the prospect for efforts to open the road on the

essence of the Cyprus problem but especially to open the road for the reduction in all armaments with the aim of demilitarization," he said.

Cyprus has said that progress toward demilitarization or a settlement of this eastern Mediterranean island's division was essential before it would consider not deploying the anti-aircraft missiles, scheduled to arrive here this month.

Under a new law Al Bashir's government will on Jan. 1 legalise political groups that may contest elections.

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Sudanese parliament reelects Tourabi

KHARTOUM (AP) — Sudan's lawmakers on Wednesday renominated the country's most influential politician as parliament speaker, two days after he had resigned to work full time for the ruling party.

Members in the 400-seat National Assembly unanimously supported Hassan Tourabi by a voice vote, backing his nomination by calls of "Allahu Akbar" or "God is great." Tourabi did

not attend the House. If he accepts the nomination as expected, he will hold the post until the end of the parliament's term in April 2000.

Tourabi had submitted his resignation to the House on Monday, saying he wanted to devote all his time to the ruling National Congress Party at a time when Sudan is making tentative moves toward a multi-party system from Jan. 1.

Tourabi's renomination took place without any hitch.

Deputy speaker Alison Manani Magaya opened the session by asking for nominations to fill the speaker's post. Another deputy speaker, Abdul Aziz Shidou, proposed Tourabi's name. No other name was proposed and the proceedings were called to an end.

Magaya, the deputy speaker, then told the legislators:

"Dr. Tourabi could resume his post anytime he wants."

On Tuesday, Sudan's Vice President Ali Osman Mohammad Taha had called on legislators to respect Tourabi's wish to resign.

Taha said his call was endorsed by President Omar Al Bashir.

Under a new law Al Bashir's government will on Jan. 1 legalise political groups that may contest elections.

Suharto son-in-law denies taking up citizenship

JAKARTA (AFP) — A son-in-law of former president Suharto, who could face court martial over the abduction of political activists, has denied taking up Indonesian citizenship, press reports said Wednesday.

"I was indeed offered Jordanian citizenship, but I answered that though I was deeply grateful, I had to refuse the offer as Indonesia does not allow dual-citizenship," Prabowo Suhianto said in a written statement carried

by newspapers here. Prabowo, a retired lieutenant general said he was a frequent visitor to Amman while pursuing a new career in business.

Reports from Jordan last week said that its citizenship was conferred on Prabowo caused an uproar here.

Prabowo and two other senior officers of the Kopassus elite military command were sanctioned in August after a military council found them guilty of involvement in

the abduction and torture of political activists earlier in the year.

Prabowo, 47, a former Kopassus chief, was given early retirement while the two others were barred from holding operational positions within the armed forces.

The military trial of 11 Kopassus soldiers, including seven non-commissioned officers, on charges of kidnapping and torture of the activists opened here Wednesday.

Armed Forces Chief General Wiranto, announcing the sanctions on the three Kopassus senior officers in August, did not rule out the possibility of the trio being dragged to military court themselves should more evidence surface during the trial of the 11 soldiers.

Justice Minister Muladi on Tuesday warned Prabowo against accepting Jordanian citizenship, saying that there could be drastic consequences if he did.



Iraqi children watch as bulldozers and workers clean the area next to a building destroyed by a U.S. missile in central Baghdad, Wednesday. In the aftermath of the bombing, three U.N. Security Council countries (China, Russia and France) seem to be getting ready to try to lift the eight year-old embargo against Iraq, revise the policy on weapons inspections and force out UNSCOM chief Richard Butler (AP photo)

Qatar ready for U.S. to fly from its territory for Desert Fox — minister

DOHA (AFP) — Qatar would have allowed American warplanes to take off from the small Gulf state to bomb Iraq during Operation Desert Fox if Washington had asked its foreign minister said.

Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassem Al Thani said U.S. aircraft had taken off from Qatar last month, when Baghdad then narrowly averted U.S.-led military action by allowing U.N. weapons inspectors to resume their work.

"If they had asked if these planes could take part in the military strikes

[against Iraq last week] ... we would have approved it because of the accords signed by Qatar with the nations that led the attacks," Sheikh Jassem told Qatari satellite television station Al Jazeera overnight Tuesday.

Baghdad accused Kuwait's ruling family of "treachery" Tuesday for hosting British and U.S. forces which took part in the air raids.

Qatar expressed last Thursday "deep concern" about the four-day bombardment and urged Baghdad to implement U.N. Security Council resolu-

tions. The United States, which signed a defence pact with Qatar following the 1991 Gulf war, is building its largest military pre-positioning base in the world in the Gulf state, according to a newspaper report last month.

In 1995, Qatar authorised the United States to stock military equipment on its territory for the U.S. military and in March, it allowed U.S. P-3 Orion surveillance planes to be based there.

Qatar also has a military cooperation accord with Britain.

Yemen frees journalist

SANAA (AP) — The Yemeni authorities freed Wednesday a foreign correspondent whom they detained for interviewing four German hostages, a journalists' union official said.

Sadek Hamaiel, a Syrian national who writes for the Berliner Zeitung newspaper, was handed over to Mahboub Ali, the regional director of the International Organisation for Journalists, after seven days in detention.

"He is frustrated that he was detained while he was doing his job. He is tired but he thinks what happened to him comes with the job," Ali said after taking Hamaiel to the German embassy.

Police arrested Hamaiel on Thursday as he returned from a meeting with the hostages

— three women and one man — in Marib province, 170 kilometres northeast of the capital, Sanaa. Hamaiel, and two Yemenis accompanying him, were charged with travelling in tribal areas without

government permission.

In June, three British Broadcasting Corp. television journalists were detained for several days on a charge of filming without government permission after spending a week with the Bani Dhabyan tribe. The BBC journalists were acquired by a Yemeni court.

Ali said Hamaiel was scheduled to return to Germany on Sunday.

The Germans were abducted Dec. 7 by three gunmen from the Bani Dhabyan tribe in Marib. The German Embassy has not given their names, but the Yemen Times has identified them as Norbert Degen, Petra Penglitz, Rozwita Adlung and Inge Brunner.

Negotiations between the tribesmen and authorities have so far failed to secure the release of the Germans. The Bani Dhabyan are reported to be seeking more schools, hospitals, telephone lines and roads in their area.

King, Queen distribute food to orphanages

AMMAN (J.T.) — At the request of Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor, food was sent to orphanages throughout the Kingdom. The King and Queen said that their extended Jordanian family, particularly the children, are in their hearts and in their thoughts.

RJ plane veers off runway at Heathrow

AMMAN (Petra) — Royal Jordanian Wednesday said one of its aircraft veered off a runway at London's Heathrow Airport Tuesday after it was forced to change course due to heavy traffic and had weather conditions. An RJ statement said the 310-passenger Airbus plane skidded off the runway after it was asked by Heathrow's flight controllers to change its route to another gate. According to the statement, no one was hurt in the incident and all the passengers left the plane safely.

Biltaji, Qatari envoy discuss tourism

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji Wednesday received Qatar's Ambassador to Amman Fahed Ben Jasim Al Thani and discussed means to develop cooperation in tourism. During the meeting, Biltaji briefed Al Thani on the Kingdom's tourist services, facilities and projects.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes

15:10Cartoon — Superman

15:30 Science fiction — Space Precinct

16:30(Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)

17:00Drama — Sparks

18:15Omar Ben Abdul Aziz

19:00Le Journal

19:15Words of Wisdom

19:30News Headlines

19:35Comedy — Family Matters

20:00 A Journey Across the Land of Islam

20:30 Drama — Dr Quinn the Medicine Woman

21:10Oprah Winfrey Show

22:00News in English

22:30 Feature film — "In the Nick of Time"

23:59Comedy — Daily

00:30End of T.X.

Friday Programmes

15:10Animated Classics

15:30Treasure Hunt

16:30(Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)

17:00The Simpsons

18:15Omar Ben Abdul Aziz

19:00Le Journal

19:15Words of Wisdom

19:30News Headlines

19:35Comedy — The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

20:00Cinema, Cinema

20:30 Islamic Heritage and Art

21:15Doc. — Full Circle

22:00News in English

22:30Drama — The X-Files

23:10 Drama — The Preppie Murder

23:59End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

05:06Fajr

06:28(Sunrise) Duha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church

Sweifish, Tel. 5920740

Assembly of God Church Tel. 4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4623666

Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweifish Tel. 5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

AMMAN: Dr. Bahjat Bader5332642

Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5350432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi4895342

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Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5350432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi4895342

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Relative cold weather conditions will prevail with skies partly cloudy. Scattered showers are expected at night and winds southwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, skies will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman05/14

Aqaba10/21

Deserts03/16

Jordan Valley10/22

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 13, Aqaba 22

Humidity readings: Amman 43 per cent, Aqaba 44 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajlun04/11

Jerash05/15

Um Qays05/16

Madaba04/14

Petra05/15

Dead Sea11/22

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN: Dr. Bahjat Bader5332642

Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5350432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi4895342

AMMAN: Dr. Bahjat Bader5332642

Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5350432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi4895342

AMMAN: Dr. Bahjat Bader5332642

Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5350432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi4895342

Dr. Khalil Al Tushuq4757253

AMMAN: Firas Pharmacy5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy5537004

Raka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID: Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh021250080

Fou'ad Pharmacy021275360

ZARQA: Dr. Walid Nabhan0913851743

Palestine Pharmacy091983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341

Civil Defence Emergency199

Rescue Police 192 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade4775212

Blood Bank4775212

Highway Police5343402

Traffic office4896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints5605800

Price Complaints5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints 4897467

Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance)121

Overseas Calls0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101

Jordan Television4773111

Radio Jordan4774111

Water Authority5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co.4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN: The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199

The Islamic, Abdli566613177

Hussein Medical Centre5856856

Luzmaia4630195

Khalidi Maternity4642816

Akileh Maternity



RAMADAN SWEETS: Restaurant workers in downtown prepare qatayef during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Pious Muslims refrain from drinking, eating and smoking during daylight hours of the month, which ends with a three-day long feast (photo by Yousef Allan)

Government's response to House's call to lift sanctions on Iraq unclear

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The government is still unclear how it will respond to the Lower House of Parliament's call to lift the economic embargo on Iraq, an informed source said Wednesday.

"The government is preparing its reply, but still is unclear how it will respond to the Lower House's demands," an informed source told the Jordan Times.

During Sunday's session Lower House of Parliament Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali led 53 deputies in condemning the strikes against Iraq and in demanding that Arab states rally behind Iraq in order to end the U.N.-imposed sanctions on the country.

One deputy after another took to the podium to voice their condemnation of the attacks that killed civilians and urged Arab governments to force their governments to take a joint stand against Washington and London and work in unison towards ending the sanctions on Iraq as well as Libya and Sudan.

"The government's response might be submitted directly to the House speaker, or presented it to the full House in one of the coming sessions," he said.

The call Monday by Jordan's 80-member Lower House was largely a gesture since it was a non-binding resolution.

It was announced Wednesday, that the government was expected to

respond during yesterday's session, but according to a Lower House of Parliament source, the speaker did not receive an official notification from the government regarding this issue.

During Wednesday's Parliament session, which Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh did not attend, deputies focused on the issue of civil service appointments.

However, Information Minister Nasser Judeh stressed Tuesday that while deputies' views were respected, the government was responsible for taking executive decisions. "Decisions related to foreign ties or relations with international organisations come under the government's responsibility," Judeh said.

The government has faced a barrage of criticism by the local media and Parliament over its reaction to the Iraqi crisis and recently over a programme aired on Jordan's satellite channel on Iraq and its leadership.

Local newspapers yesterday blasted a satellite programme, which was aired Monday jointly with several Arab television stations, about Iraq's future and President Saddam Hussein.

"We don't know why our television participated in such a programme, because we believe that discussing Iraqi affairs is only an Iraqi right," said a columnist Wednesday writing in the Arab Al Yawm Arabic daily.

The live Orbit satellite

programme, conducted a poll on the future of Iraq, its regime, and sanctions.

"Such a programme is a severe intervention in another country's affairs," said the newspaper.

Director General of Jordan Radio and Television Corporation Ibrahim Shabzada could not be reached for comment Wednesday but was quoted yesterday by Al-Dustour daily saying the programme was not an intervention in Iraq's internal affairs.

"We can't consider this as a political intervention, because most of the viewers or participants in the poll chose the third choice, [which was to reject United Nations resolutions and let bygones be bygones]," Shabzada said.

Another official described JTV's participation as "a good opportunity to express our views freely."

"I believe that it gave us the chance to express our ideas and feelings towards our brothers in Iraq," said one official. "Our participation changed the equation." However, most people interviewed by the Jordan Times disagreed.

"We believe that showing such programmes plays a major role in widening the gap between us and the people of some Gulf countries, who want the Iraqi leader ousted."

Man sentenced to death for murdering wife

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Criminal Court has sentenced a 63-year-old man to death after convicting him of the premeditated murder of his wife in March of this year.

The court tribunal found Fouad Mansour guilty of murdering his wife on March 28 in their house in Jabal Nashif over a family dispute.

According to court documents, the defendant, who was working in the West Bank, plotted to kill his wife, Naemah Yousef, after learning in February that his son was engaged in Amman without his prior knowledge, and that he was "insisting to get married with or without his father's approval."

"When the defendant returned to Jordan, his relatives tried to convince him to accept the reality and attend his son's wedding, but Mansour refused and left the country for Iraq after threatening to kill his wife and children," the court transcripts said.

Mansour returned to the country on March 28, went to his house and stabbed his wife several times in the neck and chest, and then fled to Syria, the court said.

He was arrested by Syrian authorities in June, court transcripts said.

The court dismissed the defence's argument that Mansour committed the crime in a "fit of fury," saying that the defendant's actions, leaving the country after arguing with his family and his son's marriage, indicated that it was a premeditated act.

"This means that the defendant had enough time to think calmly and plot to kill his wife," the court said.

Last week's verdict, which was handed down by Judges Mifteh Mubaidin, Issa Hamdan and Omar Khleifat, will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation within 30 days.

Nine people have been executed in the Kingdom this year after being convicted by the Criminal Court for various crimes.

Last year, 11 people were put to death in Jordan.

Deputies reject government new civil appointment strategy

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament Wednesday rejected a new policy for civil service appointments giving local governors more power.

The deputies were unanimous in their criticism of the government policy submitted by Minister of Social Development Basam Emouh which grants local governors the authority to fill vacancies in the different departments. They demanded that postings to government jobs remain through the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

Deputy Mahmoud Al Kharabsheh said the decentralisation policy has so far proved a "failure" because it lays an additional burden on the governors who, he said, lacked experience in such affairs and that such policy "opens the door for favouritism and corruption."

"The decentralisation plan in appointing employees separates one governor from another, harms national unity and has opened the door for influential persons to have their way in this sensitive

process," said Kharabsheh. He said granting this authority to the governors and their staff who are all appointed to their posts by the Ministry of Interior could give this ministry complete influence over government departments.

Kharabsheh demanded that the candidates be given jobs based on competence to be determined through interviews, examinations and the degrees they hold.

He said governors are not equipped to handle such a task because they lack experience. He said the majority of the governments do not have university degrees.

Deputy Nayef Mola, echoing the same opinion, demanded that the appointments remain the task of the CSC, which is governed by rules and regulations and enjoys vast experience in this field.

Mola also criticised the appointment of former ministers, who, he said, had failed in their jobs. He also criticised the appointment of former army officers as ambassadors while governments brag about their

commitment to regulations and rules in appointment.

In addition Mola said the majority of the employees in the customs department for instance are not university graduates and are unable to deal with foreign investors.

Deputy Mohammad Thweib demanded that a single authority should make the appointments to avoid any complications and favouritism which is likely to be the criteria in the decentralised system where governors have little experience in this task.

Deputy Kamel Omari said by granting the local governors the authority to appoint employees the government is opening the door for influential people to interfere and impose their will and could result in corruption at a large scale.

Deputy Saleh Jbour said that the government's plan of allowing governors to deal with appointments within their own respective regions encourages corruption and favouritism and does not do justice to the public at large. He demanded that the CSC be solely

authorised to handle this matter.

Deputy Amjad Majali said that the government ought first to give training to public administration officials before applying a decentralised system in the governorates. He said that the new plan opens the door for influential people and encourages favouritism and breeds corruption. The deputy demanded that the government should refer the appointments to the CSC and draw up an effective system to ensure that justice and equality are guaranteed.

Other deputies like Mansour Ben Tarif, who spoke on behalf of several other deputies, made similar criticism of the government's plan. He singled out the unfair appointments in the foreign service which, he said, seems to favour influential families of Jordan.

Altogether 40 deputies have asked to address the House and according to House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali the deputies will resume discussion of this issue in the next session.

Associations urge Jordanians to boycott U.S., U.K. products

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The 100,000-strong professional associations said Wednesday they were spearheading a nationwide campaign to encourage Jordanians to boycott U.S. and British-made goods to protest four nights of air strikes launched by the two countries on Iraq last week.

The 14-member associations of doctors, lawyers, geologists, nurses, journalists, engineers, pharmacists, artists and writers also urged the Kingdom's 4.2 million population not to attend any activities organised by the British and American embassies in Amman.

The heads of the associations, long known for political activism and strong pro-Iraqi and anti-Israeli feelings, announced these measures after a meeting late on Tuesday that looked into ways to show growing popular Arab anger over the

missile attacks.

"This is the least we can do to express the popular feeling, reject the strikes and the crippling sanctions imposed on Iraq," said Hassan Jabre, current chairman of the associations' 14-member executive council.

The associations have launched a vocal media campaign to enlist popular solidarity with Iraq over the punitive air strikes which were suspended on Sunday.

They said Jordanians had reacted positively to their week-old campaign to raise cash and in-kind donations for the Iraqis, reeling under the effects of crippling U.N. sanctions imposed after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Meanwhile, the pro-Iraqi Jordan Baath Party, which has one deputy in the 80-seat Lower House of Parliament, urged the government in a statement to expel American, British, Israeli and Kuwaiti diplomats from Jordan.

And the National Committee for Defending Iraq, formed after the 1990 Gulf crisis, urged local newspapers to boycott any functions hosted by the British and heavily-guarded American missions in Jordan.

The associations' overall decision to mobilise popular pro-Iraqi sentiments that have prevailed since the 1990-91 Gulf War, came hours after the Jordan Pharmacists Association (JPA) and the Jordan Medical Association (JMA) urged members to blacklist all British- and American-made medicine.

"We will continue our boycott as long as the crisis between Iraq, the U.S. and Britain continues," JMA president Bassem Dajani told the Jordan Times.

But the drugs will be exempt from the unprecedented boycott if no alternative product was available.

Unionists said the boycott could affect sales of the controversial impotency drug Viagra, produced by the American com-

pany, Pfizer, when it arrives on Jordanian pharmacy shelves soon after the Health Ministry approved the drug's registration last week.

British and U.S. drugs represent 15 to 20 of Jordan's \$110 million annual medicine imports, according to independent estimates.

JPA president Abdul Rahim Issa dismissed fears that the decision to boycott American and British manufacturers of medicine would have a negative impact on Jordanian patients.

"Local and foreign alternatives to the American and British drugs are available and some U.S. and British medicine would be exempt from the boycott if no local alternative is available," he said.

Jordanians from all walks of life have staged peaceful demonstrations to protest the airstrikes against Iraq, launched in the early hours of Thursday.

Municipality may charge phone companies for use of space

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The Municipality of Amman is studying the possibility of charging Jordan's two public telephone companies fees for the use of public space for their phone booths, an official said Wednesday.

"The legal committee at the municipality is studying the legality of exempting Alo and JPP public phone companies from paying fees for occupying public land," said Amman's mayor Nidal Hadid.

The two phone companies had been exempted from paying fees in 1997, in accordance with a Cabinet decision. According to an official from the municipality, however, this exemption

is illegal. The official who requested anonymity told the Jordan Times that according to the municipality's internal regulations, the Council of Ministers does not have the right to issue such an exemption.

Last week, a deputy in the Lower House of Parliament called on the government to explain why such an exemption was granted. "How is it that private-run companies were exempted from paying fees for using public land?" asked Deputy Nazih Amman.

"People do not have the right to use state land without paying for it," said the deputy.

Amman said the two telephone companies occupy

around 30,000 square metres of public land. According to regulations of the municipality of Amman, the annual charge for one square metre is JD 50. Each phone booth covers an area of one square metre.

However, financial director of Alo Ahmad Dawleh, told the Jordan Times that the company will have to increase the price of its services, if Alo is charged for the use of public property.

Alo has 2,586 phones installed across the Kingdom. The company, established in 1997, is hoping to have 7,000 phone booths by the end of 1999. JPP officials were not available for comment.

What's going on

POETRY FESTIVAL

* Poetry festival (with the participation of several poets) at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 8:00 p.m.

CONCERT

* Musical performance by Al Wahdah Band at the Royal Cultural Centre on Saturday Dec. 26 at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.
* Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade

Centre, off Wadi Sagra Street, until Dec. 31 (Tel. 5699141/2).

* "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2, until Jan. 28.

Riot police raid S. Korea's Buddhism centre, dozens injured

SEOUL (AFP) — Thousands of riot police, backed by fire engines and earth movers, stormed a Buddhist temple here Wednesday to end a row among monks, provoking a vicious battle that left dozens injured, witnesses said.

As several monks threatened to torch themselves or slit their stomachs, police in full riot gear and brandishing batons and shields moved in to Chogye Temple, the headquarters of Korean Buddhism that has been split by bickering groups.

Earth movers tore down barricades made of wood and barbed wire and two armoured trucks used powerful water hoses to help police troops force their way into the downtown compound.

Four riot police who were climbing a ladder to enter the five-storey building through its windows, lost their balance and fell 10 metres to the ground. Unconscious, they were rushed to hospital.

Some 100 occupants, including monks and their followers, put up fierce resistance to the police, hurling firebombs, bottles and furniture from the building's windows and rooftop.

Witnesses said more than 20 people were injured,

including many policemen hit by roof tiles and other projectiles. Some monks seen bleeding from wounds to the head were seen being taken away by policemen.

A few monks stripped themselves half-naked, soaked their bodies with petroleum and threatened to set themselves on fire should police troops move in. Two slightly slit open their own stomachs with knives.

"We are going to become martyrs here," shouted a monk through a loudspeaker, urging onlookers Buddhist followers, who had been in the middle of an overnight prayer, to join them in the fight.

The monks inside welded the building's entrance shut, barricaded themselves behind a bus and set fire to stacks of wooden construction materials forming the barricade in a bid to hold off the riot police, sending puffs of smoke high into the sky.

It took five hours for the police to evict the occupants in the raid, after mobilising 4,500 riot police troops including 80 police commandos, who finally succeeded in entering the building and overpowering those inside. Police took 47 of the occupants into custody.

At one stage the building caught fire, but the blaze

was immediately put out by firefighters.

The pre-dawn raid was launched after a court earlier this month gave permission for police to take action on the temple to end a feud between the monks which erupted in November.

The two rival factions — the Purification and Reform Committee (PRC) and the Constitution Safeguards Committee (CSC) — have been bickering for months over the right to name the heads of hundreds of Buddhist temples across the country and manage their budgets.

Chogye Temple has seen hundreds of rival monks clash repeatedly over the past few months, leaving dozens injured.

It has been occupied by the PRC since Nov. 11 in a bid to prevent elections for the chief administrator of the headquarters from going ahead. The PRC is apparently concerned it will be dominated by the CSC in the ballot.

The CSC won a court order to force PRC members to leave Chogye Temple, but the PRC monks held up inside and fended off officials seeking to carry out the court order.

The officials asked police to help them force their way into the temple early Wednesday to dislodge the



Monks (left) watch as special riot police fall from a crane while assaulting a building in the Chogye Buddhist temple in Seoul. Thousands of police raided the temple at daybreak Wednesday in an attempt to end a long-running dispute between monks from competing factions of South Korean Buddhism. Four policemen from the crane were rushed to hospital unconscious after falling 10 metres (AFP photo)

occupants, a request they reluctantly agreed to.

Commentators here said the police action had only deepened rifts among rival groups of South Korean monks, with tension mounting at major temples in provincial cities between

the two competing factions.

Boasting 10 million followers among South Korea's population of 43 million, Buddhism is South Korea's biggest religion with 15 centuries of deep-rooted tradition.

But its modern history has been marred by factional fights and political interference.

In 1993, riot police raided the temple to end a bout of violent rivalry, sparking an anti-government campaign.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Philippines president sacks official for waving gun

MANILA (AP) — President Joseph Estrada sacked the customs chief for allegedly poking a gun at several people at the Manila Hotel early Wednesday. In an angry letter to Customs Commissioner Pedro Mendoza, Estrada said he was firing the customs official for the "unacceptable and public misconduct." "I will not allow this kind of misbehaviour, especially from officials of your level and responsibility," he told Mendoza. In a statement later, Estrada said, officials "have to set the example, otherwise, I will set it for them." A hotel statement said Mendoza allegedly poked his pistol at a lawyer and his son in a hallway of the floor of the hotel "for no apparent reason." The police said Mendoza also poked his gun at three hotel security officers. The hotel statement said Mendoza locked himself in his room and apparently took sedatives. He remained asleep until noon and was whisked away in an ambulance to an undisclosed hospital. The gun was later seized by the police. Last week, Mendoza stormed out of a Senate hearing on the importation of toy guns that look like the real thing. Mendoza was angered after senators pointed out his "ignorance" of an old decree banning the sale of such toys that is still in effect.

German police arrest suspected railway blackmailer

BONN (AP) — Police have arrested a man suspected of trying to extort 10 million marks (\$6 million) from the German railways with acts of sabotage, officials said Wednesday. Police, aided by air force reconnaissance planes, had been chasing the blackmailer for several weeks amid a growing holiday-season scare for railway employees and passengers. Helicopters and 400 extra federal border police were also ordered out to patrol rail lines. The suspect was arrested late Tuesday at an autobahn rest area in Bavaria, the Austria Press Agency reported. He had been enroute to a ransom money handover in neighbouring Austria, where police were poised to nab him, the report said, quoting the Austrian interior ministry. German Transport Minister Franz Mueentzberger voiced relief, calling the arrest "reassuring news for the safety of all train travellers at Christmas time." Earlier, the manhunt had centred on the northeast of the country, where rail lines were sabotaged several times in recent weeks.

Assam governor says Bangladesh migrants pose security threat

GUWAHATI, India (AFP) — The governor of the north-east Indian state of Assam has warned of a national security threat posed by an influx of illegal Bangladesh immigrants. In a 42-page confidential report to Indian President K.R. Narayanan, Governor S.K. Sinha said Bangladesh immigrants may "swamp the Assamese people and may sever the northeast land mass from the rest of India." The report, which was leaked to the press, said an estimated 10 million Bangladesh Muslims had settled illegally along the Brahmaputra River in Assam's western and eastern districts after crossing the porous land and river border. "The ground reality is that of late almost all the illegal migrants now coming into Assam are Muslims," the governor's report said. The document also pointed out that deportation was "no longer a practical proposition" as Bangladesh would not accept the migrants back. Several political parties and organisations representing minorities in Assam slammed the report Wednesday as "biased" and called for Sinha's dismissal. "He is trying to incite communal passions, by saying that all illegal immigrants are Muslims," said Hafiz Rashid Choudhury, secretary of the United Minorities Forum. "The governor must be removed," he added. But Sinha was unrepentant. "Nobody can stop me doing what I feel is good for the people of Assam," he said. "If immediate steps are not taken to stop the illegal infiltration, Assam will not survive."

Judge sums up in Belgian corruption trial

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Belgium's most senior judge began summing up Wednesday in the trial of 12 people including French industrialist Serge Dassault and former NATO chief Willy Claes on charges of corruption in military contracts. The summing up by the president of the court of cassation, the country's top court, followed a two and a half month hearing starting on Sept. 2 and five weeks of deliberations by the 15-judge appeals panel. The prosecution has asked for suspended prison sentences for the accused, who include two former Belgian ministers — Claes and Guy Coeure along with a top socialist politician, Guy Spitzels. The defendants were charged in connection with millions of dollars in bribes allegedly paid in 1988 and 1989 by Dassault Electronique and the Italian firm Agusta to Belgium's ruling socialists to secure defence contracts. The judges will have to decide whether bribes were paid and, if so, at what level. The prosecution alleged corruption at the highest levels of government, while the defence argued that at most secret financing was arranged by civil servants.

Four Ukrainian children die in house fire

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Four children left alone at home died after one of the kids ignited a fire while playing with matches, officials said Wednesday. A 5-year-old boy started the fire, and he was asphyxiated by the smoke along with three younger children, the Emergency Situations Ministry said. Three more children from the same family were rescued by their elder brother when he returned home from school and put out the fire, the ministry said. The accident occurred Tuesday in the village of Bilka in the Zhytomyr region after the children's parents went to see their friends in a neighbouring village.

Glow-in-the-dark woman in Vietnam

HANOI (AFP) — A woman from central Vietnam has developed a rare condition which causes parts of her skin to glow in the dark, a local report said Wednesday. Truong Thi Thu Ha, 30, from a remote district in Quang Nam province discovered late on Dec. 10 she had acquired spots which emitted light, the Thanh Nien newspaper reported. The glow's intensity reportedly increased when Ha wore nylon garments, the paper said. Ha could not be reached for comment and local police were unable to corroborate the press report. A similar condition was reported in March 1997 involving a 17-year-old boy in another province.

11 Indonesian soldiers tried for abduction, torture of activists

JAKARTA (AFP) — Eleven members of Indonesia's elite special forces went on trial here Wednesday charged with being part of a team which abducted and tortured political activists in the last months of the Suharto era.

The trial at the Jakarta Military High Court opened with the military prosecutor reading out the charges against the 11 defendants, eight of them junior officers.

The small tightly-guarded courtroom was packed with people, including human rights activists and journalists.

Among those present was Pius Lustrilianing, one of those allegedly kidnapped and tortured by the defendants — all members of the feared Kopassus special forces.

Kopassus was under the command of a son-in-law of former president Suharto, now-retired general Prabowo Subianto, at the time of the kidnappings.

It was believed to be involved in the kidnapping and torture of at least 23 activists early this year. But the charges only relate to the nine who have since surfaced with tales of torture and incarceration.

One other activist has been found dead and 13 are still missing.

The defendants were identified as eight captains and three sergeants.

The captains were named

as Bambang Kristiono, 37, Nugroho Sulistyono Budi, 31, Multhazar, 35, Yulius Selvanus, 36, Untung Budi Harto, 33, Dadang Hendra Yudha, 33, Jaka Budi Utama, 31, and Fauka Noor Farid, 29.

The sergeants were master sergeants Sunaryo, 37, and Sigit Sugianto, 39, and first sergeant Sukadi, 38.

Military prosecutor Colonel Harom Wijaya said the 11 were members of the "Rose Team" within Kopassus which had abducted at least nine people in February and March.

The team, set up by Kristiono, arrested individuals deemed "radical" because "his conscience called for safeguarding national interest."

Kristiono gave the order to kidnap the nine activists, Wijaya added.

If found guilty the 11 defendants, who have been in detention since July 14, face up to seven years' imprisonment.

But despite army pledges to root out those responsible, the trial has drawn sharp criticism from some who say junior officers are being made scapegoats for their seniors and the army as a whole.

Munir, the head of the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), described the court martial as a "comedy."

The trial, he told a press conference, was only "to

N. Korea rejects border talks over infiltration

SEOUL (AP) — North Korea Wednesday rejected the American-led U.N. Command's proposal for border talks to discuss the sinking of a suspected communist spy boat in South Korean waters.

The low-slung, 13-tonne North Korean boat went down off South Korea's south coast Friday in a gun battle with South Korean navy ships.

The command, acting on a South Korean request, proposed to North Korea Monday that military generals from both sides meet in the truce village of Panmunjom to protest what the Seoul government considered a "grave military provocation."

"Although obliged to respond favourably to such a proposal by the agreement

establishing the general officer talks, the Korean People's Army today rejected the meeting," the command said in a news release Wednesday.

The command said it will continue to press North Korea to live up to its obligations.

South Korea said the craft was on a mission to land spies. But North Korea accused the South of fabricating the incident.

With the help of the United States, South Korea keeps close watch on the North with camera-equipped satellites and spy planes and communications intercepts. Lacking such sophisticated tools, North Korea counters by trying to place spies in the South via land and sea routes.

The U.N. Command and the

North's Korean People's Army signed the 1953 armistice that ended the three-year Korean war, which American-led U.N. forces fought on South Korea's behalf.

Both sides hold the general officer talks to discuss enforcement and violations of the armistice.

The North Korean boat, believed to be carrying up to eight crewmen, was first spotted as it approached a port on the South's south coast. It was pursued for hours by South Korean warships before it was sunk in a gun battle.

The lack of a peace treaty between the two Koreas leaves them technically still in a state of war.

NATO troops remove Croatian police from disputed border area

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — The NATO-led peace force in Bosnia removed Croatian police from a disputed area along Bosnia's western border to Croatia, NATO announced Wednesday.

Bosnia and Croatia are currently negotiating to define the border near Martin Brod, a small town in Bosnia, some 220 kilometres west of Sarajevo.

Martin Brod was considered part of Bosnia before

the 1991-1995 war but since the fighting ended, Croatian authorities have moved the border deeper into Bosnia.

When they returned to the area after fighting stopped, many of the residents of Martin Brod found their homes or land on the other side of the border, in Croatia and they were blocked from returning by Croatian border police.

Bosnia's top international official, Carlos Westendorp,

sent a letter to both countries saying until the two border commissions agree on the frontier, he will consider the pre-war demarcation line to be valid.

In response to a request from Westendorp's office, the NATO-led peace force removed the Croatian police without any incident, a NATO press release said.

"The territory is now under the jurisdiction of the federation police," the statement said.

Doctor's eye promising magnetic surgery technique

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Surgeons may some day treat brain tumours and heart ailments with the click of a computer mouse.

Washington University neurosurgeon Ralph Dacey used a pioneering magnetic surgery technique to direct a biopsy needle to the brain tumour of a 31-year-old man. The Dec. 17 biopsy at Barnes-Jewish Hospital indicated the man needed chemotherapy.

The Magnetic Surgery System will be tested on four other brain tumour patients over the next several months, Dacey said Tuesday. Several years of trials will likely be

necessary before the procedure is commonly used.

Dacey and officials with Stereotaxis Inc., which helped develop the system, believe it will help in getting surgical tools — and perhaps medicine — to hard-to-reach areas of the brain and the heart. They say it may eventually help treat aneurysms, coronary artery disease and other ailments.

For a traditional biopsy, a surgeon would manually push a rigid needle via a long, narrow catheter through the brain to the tumour.

Magnetic surgery allows the catheter to follow curved

routes, bypassing sensitive areas of the brain, or travel along blood vessels to or near the heart, Dacey said.

Surgeons around the country said the procedure appears promising.

"I just think this is a better way," said Warren Selman, professor of neurosurgery at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

"I think part of our problem is getting around structures that are in the way," Selman said. "The ability to steer around an object instead of merely go through it is an exciting development."

In magnetic surgery involving a brain tumour, a small

hole is drilled in the patient's skull. The surgeon places a plastic bolt in the hole to provide entry for a guidewire with a magnet that travels through a catheter about the width of a strand of spaghetti.

The surgeon views magnetic resonance images (MRIs) of the patient's brain on a computer screen. The three-dimensional view allows him to plan the best route to the tumour.

The patient's head is placed in a machine between superconducting magnets and a catheter is inserted through the bolt. The surgeon, sitting at the computer console, uses

a mouse or joystick to guide the magnet to the tumour in about five minutes. The guidewire positioning system pushes the small magnet through the brain, with the fields from the superconducting magnets controlling its direction.

When the head of the instrument reaches the desired area, the surgeon pulls out the guidewire, leaving the catheter in place to act as a tunnel. He then inserts a tiny surgical tool through the catheter that snips out a tissue sample for the biopsy.

Universities and laboratories around the United States have been developing mag-

netic surgery for more than a decade. Trials have been previously performed on animals.

Doug Kondziolka, professor of neurosurgery at the University of Pittsburgh, called the procedure very promising but said there are concerns.

"How reliable is this way to control something deep in the brain?" he asked. "For example, control of the magnetic field, the control and accuracy of the manipulation." Dacey said the procedure is safe, even in the event of a computer failure. If that happens, he said, surgery would be performed manually.

Spanish p

Madrid (AP) — The Spanish government has agreed to pay compensation to the families of the victims of the 1971-72 Basque ETA attacks. The government will pay 10 million euros to the families of the victims of the 1971-72 Basque ETA attacks. The government will pay 10 million euros to the families of the victims of the 1971-72 Basque ETA attacks.

Pakistan efforts

Islamabad (AP) — Pakistan's foreign minister said Wednesday that his country is making efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Kashmir issue. He said that Pakistan is committed to a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue and is working closely with the international community to achieve this goal.

Round drift o

Beijing (AP) — A Chinese air traffic controller grumbled Wednesday that planes flying between Xi'an, site of China's famed Terracotta Warriors, and the capital Beijing were having to adjust their flight paths because of the "round drift" of the air traffic. The controller said that the planes were having to fly in a circular pattern around the city of Xi'an, which was causing delays and confusion.



A Cambodian soldier loads mercury contaminated industrial waste into a drum in the southern province of Sihanoukville. About 500 soldiers donned protective suits to clear thousands of tonnes of Taiwanese industrial waste that sparked a panicked exodus from Cambodia's main port and surrounding province. The port of Sihanoukville was operating normally for shipping despite weekend rioting. Some soldiers complained that they were too hot wearing protective masks (Reuters photo)

Cambodia demands compensation as farce hits waste clean-up operation

SIHANOUKVILLE. Cambodia's government Wednesday demanded compensation from Taiwan over the dumping of alleged toxic waste close to this southern coastal resort, as initial clean-up efforts failed.

More than 600 soldiers were ordered back to barracks after several were overcome by dizziness — not through exposure to the 3,000 tonnes pile of waste, but from their cumbersome protective suits that caused heat exhaustion.

Environment Minister Mok Mareth admitted that heat and lack of experience were causing real problems, after one soldier collapsed while taking part in the task of clearing the consignment, sparking a tactical withdrawal.

Troops clad in plastic suits, masks, rubber gloves and shoes lasted only minutes in the searing seaside heat and humidity. Most were forced to remove their masks to breathe.

None of the 15,000 barrels

standing by to contain the mystery waste were filled, much to the disappointment of the tens of unprotected reporters gathered for the event.

Officials said they would try again later in the day with an ambulance on standby. The operation is likely to switch to using heavy plant machinery.

"We are not going to take risks with this situation, but we need to solve it as soon as possible," deputy prime minister Sar Kheng said.

"Our determination is still to take this waste away as soon as possible," he added. "Taiwan will have to pay compensation to poor Cambodia for this."

The government has pledged to send the huge pile of grey-coloured rubble, dumped 14 kilometres from Sihanoukville on a hill overlooking the Neam national park, back to Taiwan.

A team of Thai military chemical specialists have only confirmed the waste is not radioactive, and Wednesday took away sam-

ples promising results "within days."

Over the weekend two deaths which locals feared were linked to the consignment led to rioting in which the home of the governor was gutted by fire and local government offices ransacked.

Although the town returned to calm on late Sunday, scores of police remain on hand to prevent further disturbances.

Sihanoukville's police chief Chem Bunsai said 10 people had been arrested and charged with inciting riots or destruction of public property, among them two local workers from the Cambodian human rights group Licadho.

Amnesty International has dubbed them "possible prisoners of conscience," while the United Nations Human Rights office here complained the arrests "undermine the work of human rights defenders."

Initial government investigations into the waste scandal point to high-level cor-

ruption, and Tuesday Prime Minister Hun Sen said customs, port and local government officials may have accepted a bribe as high as \$3 million to let it in.

Sar Kheng said several officials had already been dismissed from their posts.

The Taiwanese petrochemicals giant behind the consignment, Formosa Plastics, denies the waste is toxic and described it on documents as "construction waste."

A company official said Tuesday they did not believe the shipment was dangerous to human life but they would comply with the Cambodia's demand to recover the waste.

"We don't know what was going on there, nor do we know why a well-handled waste was exaggerated as hazardous pollutant," the official told AFP in Taipei.

Government officials here say it is compressed ash from an industrial incinerator and contains massive quantities of mercury.

Spanish premier welcomes Basque peace feelers

MADRID (AFP) — Tentative peace feelers between Basque separatists and the Spanish government continued to emerge Wednesday with press reports that conservative Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar had welcomed the ETA Basque guerrilla movement's reaffirmation of its three-month-old ceasefire.

The reports said Aznar also found "positive" the fact that ETA's political wing Herri Batasuna Tuesday had welcomed his suggestion that talks be held between Basques and the government.

Aznar said the restating of the ETA truce, which the guerrillas had always described as open-ended but not indefinite, raised hopes for peace in the troubled Basque country, said the press reports, which quoted remarks the premier made during a lunch with deputies of his ruling People's Party.

Government sources quoted by the Madrid daily El Pais said the ETA ceasefire was seen as hopeful because it came on the heels of Aznar's own suggestion last Friday of talks with the Basques.

It was also, the sources noted, the first Basque call

for contacts with the government since the ETA ceasefire was announced Sept. 16.

Herri Batasuna said in a statement Tuesday that it accepted Aznar's suggestion.

"We are open to and we welcome with responsibility the Spanish executive's proposal" to confer with ETA's political wing, the statement said.

In a statement late Monday, ETA said it regretted that Aznar's government had not made direct contact since it declared its truce.

But it remained unclear Wednesday whether the

government intended to engage in negotiations.

A government official said Tuesday that no "direct contact" with ETA had occurred, despite a conflicting government claim last Friday that "significant contact" had been made.

Herri Batasuna's statement said representatives of the Basques and the government had "communicated," without stipulating what exactly that meant. Any contact would have been the first publicly acknowledged by the separatist group with Aznar's government since it came to power in May 1996.

Pakistan, Tajikistan to step up efforts for Afghan peace

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Pakistan and Tajikistan agreed Wednesday to intensify their efforts to achieve peace in Afghanistan, saying the current situation offered "unique" prospects for a settlement.

The agreement came in a meeting between the visiting Tajik Foreign Minister Talbat Nazarov and his Pakistani counterpart Sartaj Aziz.

They "agreed to intensify their efforts" towards durable peace in Afghanistan "both bilaterally as well as through the six-plus-two mechanism," said an official statement.

The six-plus-two group, set up under United Nations auspices, includes

Afghanistan's neighbours China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, besides Russia and the United States.

Nazarov and Aziz agreed that "the ground situation in Afghanistan presented a unique possibility for reaching an early settlement," the statement said.

They called upon the group to exert more efforts to achieve the objective, it added.

Pakistan and Tajikistan "emphasised the need to end outside interference in Afghanistan without which durable peace would not be possible," the statement said.

"There should be an end

to outside interference and supply of arms to Afghanistan, the Afghans should be allowed to sit together to find a solution themselves and the Six-plus-Two should play a supporting role," it added.

The two countries decided to "work together" to fulfil the objectives.

Nazarov arrived here Tuesday following a visit by the Uzbek foreign minister as part of intensified consultations between Pakistan and countries bordering Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Siddique Khan Kanju, visited the Central Asian republics in August and November.

U.N. special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi visited Islamabad last week after talks in Tehran. He met Pakistani officials and representatives of the Afghan Taliban Islamic militia.

The hardline Taliban claim to control 90 per cent of Afghanistan although independent sources say the figure is closer to 75 per cent following recent gains by the forces of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the only countries to recognise the Taliban government. The United Nations still recognises ousted president Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Round-the-world balloonists drift over China's ancient sites

BEIJING (AP) — British entrepreneur Richard Branson and his teammates floated over northern China's ancient sites Wednesday after the government bowed to British appeals to let their balloon pass through prohibited airspace.

One Chinese air traffic controller grumbled that planes flying between Xi'an, site of China's famed terracotta warriors, and the capital Beijing were having to adjust their flight paths because of the balloon.

"People don't like uninvited guests," said the controller at Xianyang Airport, near Xi'an. He refused to give his name.

British diplomats worked late into the evening Tuesday seeking Chinese permission for the round-the-

world balloon, which flies with a combination of hot air and helium, to continue its course.

China's Foreign Ministry finally telephoned Britain's ambassador at about 9.30 p.m. (1330 GMT) to say that the balloon could carry on "but it has to leave Chinese airspace as soon as possible," said embassy spokeswoman Harriet Hall.

"I'm gripping wood with both hands," she added when asked if she expected further problems for the flight.

The Chinese air traffic controller said the balloon could be seen with the naked eye and on radar as it passed over the walled city of Xi'an, about 900 kilometres southwest of Beijing, Wednesday morning. No commercial flights were

delayed or cancelled because of its passage, he added.

"It's flying OK," added another air traffic controller in Beijing.

Branson, American millionaire Steve Fossett and Per Lindstrand of Sweden, aloft in the ICO Global balloon beading eastward around the globe, were hoping to catch a jetstream to get them quickly out of Chinese airspace.

"We are going to look ... for the fastest, most direct route out of China, which is what the balloon wants to do anyway," said project director Mike Kendrick.

China originally had given the balloonists permission to cross the country below 26 degrees north latitude. But they drifted further north Monday after navigating around

Mediterranean storms and closed airspace over Iraq, Iran and Russia.

The Chinese then asked the balloonists to land in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, but the balloon overshot the airfield.

As it became apparent that the balloon would inevitably cross into unauthorised Chinese territory, Prime Minister Tony Blair sent a message to Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji asking for China's help.

"Thank you to the Chinese government," Branson said upon hearing that China had finally granted permission for them to continue their flight.

"We are embarrassed to have entered the airspace without permission and relieved that they understand our position."

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GSN

Fastlink
Keep Close

Increasingly detailed genomics, including myotonic disease and familial breast cancer, and rapid and more sophisticated immunotherapy techniques, and even replacement of genomes of six microbes, are earning what is unique in biotechnology: oil spills.

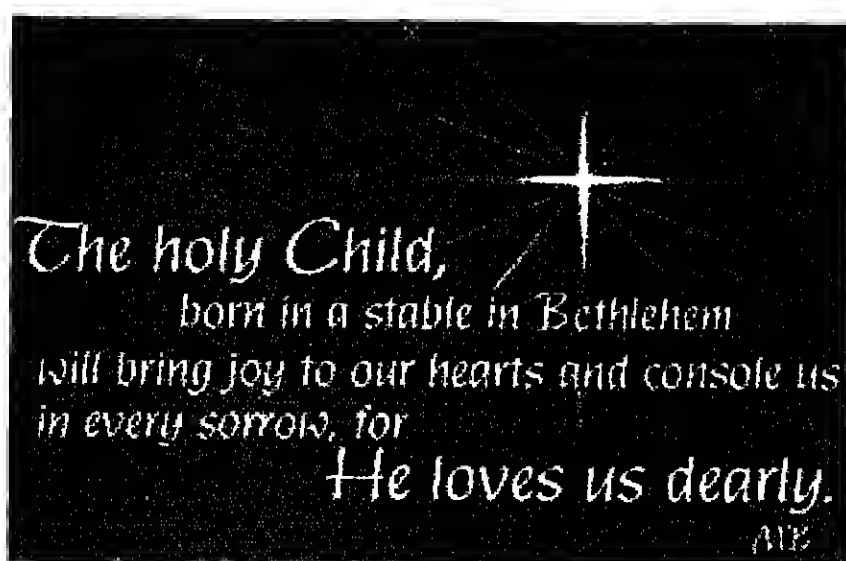
Society on the move A look westward

Our limited news this week comes from friends in the self-rule areas and Arab East Jerusalem.

WEIN 'A RAMALLAH: Safwan Bataina is making a move he has been waiting for. After setting up and managing the Palestine Security Exchange for over three years, Bataina, who obtained a B.A. in economics at Columbia University and an MBA in finance and accounting from Columbia's Graduate School of Business, will start the new year as general manager of the Arab Palestinian Investment Bank (APIB). The Ramallah-based APIB is a subsidiary of Arab Bank Ltd. and is the only investment bank in the self-rule areas. Bataina will maintain his seat on the board of the securities exchange. He has served two separate times as advisor to the prime minister (from 1988-1990 and from 1992-1994). During the period between his stints in the civil service he was recruited by Deloitte Touche Ross to manage the Private Services Development Project — one of the largest USAID-funded projects in Jordan. It was at that time Bataina contributed a weekly column to the Jordan Times — his editors still regard him with respect and fondness. His earlier overseas career took him back and forth across the Atlantic. He was a vice president with E.F. Hutton & Co., and before that an associate at Paine Webber Inc. —

both positions requiring his expertise in New York as well as London. Just after completing his MBA in 1980 Bataina was recruited as an associate of corporate finance with Smith Barney, Harris Upham & Co. in New York. His early demonstration of his industriousness — Bataina worked through most of his undergraduate years as a dispatcher and night manager for a New York courier service — has certainly paid off.

WHO DESERVES A COKE TODAY? Now we know what U.S. Secretary of Commerce William M. Daley was up to in Gaza accompanying President Bill Clinton as part of his two-day tour of the region last week. Daley was there to applaud the Coca-Cola Company's partnership with the Palestinian-owned National Beverages Company. The companies' joint investment — a 2,500 square metre distribution centre — is expected to improve the distribution of all 'Coca-Cola' products to Gaza where demand from the Palestinian consumer is said to be growing rapidly. Memorable quotes of the day included a profound inference from the U.S. Commerce Secretary. He said, "Coca-Cola goes anywhere in the world where people are thirsty, and the people of Gaza are thirsty for Coke." Also, Zahi Khoury,



The holy Child,
born in a stable in Bethlehem
will bring joy to our hearts and console us
in every sorrow, for
He loves us dearly.

chairman of NBC, remarked: "As we look at this development today, I know that many of you see just a number of buildings — but I see much more. The distribution centre we have opened on this [Gaza Industrial] estate is truly symbolic of our new partnership with the Coca-Cola Company here in Gaza and the West Bank." The Coca-Cola Company announced its partnership with NBC, the largest bottling company in Gaza/West Bank, last July. Since that time production and distribution of

'Coca-Cola' products has risen and this new distribution centre has been acquired to help manage the rise in demand from the Palestinian consumer, Coca-Cola said. NBC uses its extensive distribution network and ties with 15,000 retail outlets to make Coca-Cola products available to nearly 3 million consumers across the territories. Through the alliance, the Coca-Cola Company acquired a 15 per cent shareholding in NBC. Based in Ramallah's industrial zone, NBC covers a land area of 10,000

square metres, including production and distribution centre facilities. It is said to employ more than 100 people from the local community. NBC produces Coca-Cola, diet Coke, Fanta, and Sprite in 330 ml cans and 1.5 and 2 litre non-returnable plastic PET bottles. Fawzi Fawzi, described as a "veteran of the soft drink industry," has been appointed the general manager. According to Coca-Cola, through the world's largest distribution system, consumers in nearly 200 countries and territories enjoy the Coca-Cola company's products at a rate of more than one billion servings per day. Holy Muckeral!

GOD'S SPEED: The last two sisters serving the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary departed their 30-year home in Jerusalem last month to return to their Mother house in Germany in Darmstadt. Both in their 70s Sister Cecilia and Sister Elisabeth's work in Jerusalem began in the early days when they provided a place where pilgrims could come to talk in their house on a slope on the Mount of Olives. The sisters supplied hotels with booklets about the holy places and placed many plaques throughout Palestine at holy sites. The plaques, usually written in German and English, often describe the special event that took place

at the site. Other plaques have been placed in natural settings and religious sites in the region. There is one such plaque at church cared for by the monks of the Franciscan Order at Mt. Nebo in Madaba, the site from where Moses saw the Promised Land. The reading on the plaque is taken from John, Chapter 1 Verse 17: "While the law was given by Moses, Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ." Another plaque is set at the Christian cemetery in Wehdat. The work of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, founded by Sister M. Basileu Schlink, is featured in a book published in 1997 entitled *A Celebration of God's Unfailing Love: Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary 1947-1997*. The sisters leave behind them a large community of young and old friends, not knowing whether the sisterhood will one day send successors to continue their work. To all they wish a blessed feast.

And to our good readers
the season's best
to you and yours.

Merry Christmas,
Happy Ramadan,
and a Joyous New Year!

Jennifer Hamarnell

Science and Technology

British and American scientists make history

By Tim Radford

THEY BROUGHT a worm to book. They completed and published the blueprint for an entire complex, multicellular organism. It may be small and it may be a worm but its basic functions are our basic functions. Biology today lurches forward: the complete mapping of human genetic make-up gets ever closer.

It took 15 years in all, and involved identifying more than 97 million bits of DNA that add up to a recipe for more than 19,000 genes. These 19,000 genes are what it takes to make a worm turn, turn, squirm, eat, digest, and make what passes for love in the microscopic world of the nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans*. This worm is no more than 1mm from end to end. It is about as simple as a multicellular creature can get, and it takes about four days to get from egg to worm. It comes in just two sexes: male and self-fertilising hermaphrodite, but it can still manage to produce around 100 offspring before it dies.

It now joins some other important organisms whose DNA code is now complete, and published on the Internet, for the benefit of researchers all over the planet. One of them is yeast, which has been providing cakes and ale for humankind for at least 6,000 years. Another is *Helicobacter pylori*, which has been providing modern humans with stomach ulcers for decades. A third is *Typhlozoon pallidum* better known as venereal syphilis, which has been a global health problem since about the time Columbus came back from America. A third is a strange little monster called *Methanococcus jannaschii* which lives in volcanic vents almost two miles under the ocean.

But these are all single-celled organ-

isms: each one a microscopic blob of life's machinery. *C. elegans* is different: it is made of 959 cooperating blobs of living tissue. The nematode may be too small even to step on, but it is a giant leap for mankind, all the same. The research matters for its own sake — four out of every five creatures on the planet is a nematode worm — and as a measure of the sheer effort taken so far. But there is bigger game to be stalked and bagged, within the blueprint for a worm. The worm may be small, but it is the nearest organism to humans so far described. It is a milestone in the race to map the DNA sequences of mice, rats, rice, thalecress, zebrafish, chicken, pig and other useful complex creatures. And it is a kind of shortcut to the greatest prize of all: the entire three billion-letter alphabet that will spell out the 80,000 genes or so that describe what it is to be human.

That last should, if all goes well, be finished by 2003: a momentous date, exactly 50 years after James Watson and Francis Crick determined the structure of the double helix that supports the DNA code, the four-letter chemical alphabet that describes all life on the planet. Crick and Watson are still working as scientists. That is a measure of the speed of the operation. The scale of the achievement is already enough to make even the achiever reel: new human genes are being identified, described, examined and even tinkered with almost every week. The sum of a creature's genes is called its genome. More than 40 nations have joined the Human Genome Organisation to complete the project, at a cost — a figure plucked from the air, because nobody knows how to do the accounting — of about \$3 billion.

The worm was turned a good account chiefly by a team from Washington University in St. Louis and the Sanger

Centre in Cambridge, C. elegans exists almost everywhere in the temperate world but the project started in Cambridge more than 30 years ago with some worms collected from decaying mushrooms in Bristol, although the systematic decision to sequence the entire genome was taken only in the eighties. Since then, Sanger scientists helped map the chromosomes of yeast: they are also working on fruitflies and pufferfish, chickens, tuberculosis, malaria and the little bacterium that delivers bubonic plague. This morning, in the American journal *Science*, the Sanger Centre's chief John Sulston and his colleagues announce the completion of the worm project. As they see it, it's both an end and a beginning.

"We have in coded form essentially all the information needed to make an animal," Dr. Sulston says. "In a chicken-and-egg kind of way everything that is needed is written in the genome of *C. elegans*, which is the first animal to get sequenced. So there we have it. We can't understand it all. But if you want to understand how an animal works what better basis can you imagine than actually having in your hand all the information, even if it is written in a code we cannot fully understand?"

He sees the 97 million-letter alphabet as a magnificent tool kit for understanding: a starting point for identifying all the genes in the little worm. Genes make proteins. Proteins make tissue, and tissues make systems, and systems make behaviour. With the genetic blueprint, it is possible to see a little worm as a kind of complex, subtle orchestra of parts which play together in almost magical harmony. But mice, chickens and humans march to the same harmonies: research into the genomes of yeast, bacteria, worms and humans tells the same over and over again: all life on Earth is intimately related. If you

can discover what makes a yeast or a worm tick, you have at least part of the answer to a human mystery. So each gene identified and catalogued is a prize for science.

The yeast scientists — a Europe-wide consortium — have had a couple of years' start. They already have a measure of the massive task ahead. "In all of these organisms we find we do not know on any level what between 40 and 60 per cent of the genes do. Sometimes we recognise them sometimes we don't. Even if you recognise them because they are similar to genes in other organisms, it doesn't necessarily tell you what their role in the organisms is," says Professor Stephen Oliver, of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. But even yeast has genes that parallel human afflictions. One yeast gene produces a protein doctors recognise: it is called frataxin. In humans, it is produced by a gene that is linked with Friedreich's ataxia, a neurodegenerative condition which makes the legs unsteady. "Well, yeast doesn't have legs," says Professor Oliver. But yeast, being simple, can show exactly what the gene does: you can swap yeast and human genes and watch the effect at work in a laboratory dish.

The worm will add to that value. Some worm genes announced themselves almost immediately, in computer analysis. Because DNA is a code, you can use sophisticated algorithms to "spot" meaning the a string of gobbledegook. Other genes have been spotted swiftly by comparison with sequences from other animals. The next trick is to see what they do, how they work, and the instructions that set the genetic machinery in operation will also be coded in the DNA sequence. The worm will be a kind of data resource for biologists for decades to come. It is beginning to answer questions about the machinery of programmed cell death, and therefore about cancer. It is beginning to answer questions about why cells grow old and die.

"The picture one has to have is that all sorts of things drop out immediately," says Dr. Sulston. "Most of the sequence has been out for years now and has provided lots of starting points for researchers. There are lots of new research projects starting up: it has stimulated a whole field of biology. There will be far more value yet to be extracted from it than we can see at this point."

The next endeavour is gene therapy: treatment, based on precise knowledge, to repair the faults provided by heedless nature. The human genome project actually began with the search for individual genes that have blighted certain families for generations: muscular dystrophy, Huntington's chorea and so on. The genes have been found. Treatment based on the knowledge of the genes so far, has proved tantalising. Biologists can see what goes wrong in cases of, say, cystic fibrosis. But help for the sufferers is still a long way away. "There will be lots of little individual breakthroughs which will benefit individual

Glossary of terms

What is DNA?

It's the four similar chemical "bases" repeated millions of times throughout a genome. The human genome for example has three billion pairs of bases. The particular order of bases underlines life's diversity. Chromosomes are identifiable packages of DNA. Because organisms are related through similarities in DNA sequences insights gained from non-human genomes often lead to knowledge of human biology.

What's 'sequencing'?

It's the process of determining the exact order of the three billion pairs of bases.

What is the genome?

It's all the DNA in an organism, including its genes. Except for identical twins, each human has their own unique genome.

What is a gene?

Genes carry information for making the proteins required for life. These determine how the organism looks, how it absorbs energy from food and how it behaves.

patients. There is going to be an ongoing series of advances which will depend, in part, on the genome. But they will also depend of course on experimental ingenuity."

That's the tool kit bit: the genome helps, but it does not provide instant solutions. But the knowledge is expected to pay off, handsomely, in terms of public health. The betting is that people who die relatively early in the life of heart failure, or stroke, or cancer, die because of their own peculiar mix of genes: evolution has a way of keeping people alive until they're ready to procreate and rear their young. Then, so to speak, it loses interest. But genes are only half the story: the environment in which the genes survive or fail is the other half. The knowledge of the human blueprint is already beginning to provide useful information about the lifestyle and diets that tend to healthy maturity. It is also beginning to present insurance companies and health authorities with some ethical headaches: if someone has "bad" genes, why would you want to accept them as a risk. If they have terrific genes, why should they pay your premiums?

Right now, it is the worm's turn in the limelight. It was small, broad fast and it was transparent: researchers could actually see what was going on in the worm. "It's simpler than a human, in terms of the range of organ structures, but it has a gut, it has muscle, it has skin and it has a nervous system," Dr. Sulston says. "It's a wonderful test tube for biology, you can move things in there, and have them work, and look at them more closely. We haven't come to the end of something. We have come to the beginning of something."

— The Guardian

Our love affair with computers

By Jean-Claude Elias

chip talk

WHAT DO personal computers have that make us love them so much?

A cool-minded analyst would easily reveal their countless imperfections and flaws. Computers are often subject to partial or complete technical failures, they would say. To keep up with the trend we must update them once or twice a year, which means we never stop paying for their maintenance. The software that allows us to operate them is never perfect, and always subject to dreadful virus infections — 24,000 different types have been identified to-date.

And then, we are constantly bombarded with new versions of the programmes we use. As soon as we start feeling comfortable using one of them, a newer one appears that sends us back to (re)computer schools, and we then start learning new ways to deal with it all over again. And of course, personal computers always let us down when we least expect it, when we need them most, or on weekends when there is no one to call in for help.

And yet, we cannot imagine living without them. Consciously or not, we gladly accept the status quo imposed on us by these machines. For better or worse, we have learnt to live with them and they have become indispensable.

Gone are the times when one would study the feasibility or the usefulness of buying a small computer system. We are way beyond that point.

Our main concern now is to have the fastest and the most powerful machine we can afford.

We can now give hundreds of good reasons why we need the PC. Writing, drawing, surfing the Web, sending e-mails, playing games, doing our accounts, sending faxes, printing reports, editing sound, music or photographs, learning foreign languages, consulting multimedia encyclopaedias, etc.... the list goes on.

This time of year, anywhere in the world, sales of PCs go skyrocketing. But is it not the perfect gift for everyone? For grandparents or grandchildren, for the tech-head or the writer, and for virtually any type of human being. A PC is a gift that is sure to please.

During the past few years our relationship with personal computers has grown very strong. Some even talk to their machine, thanking it when it's doing fine and scolding it when it fails (after all, some talk to their green plants, don't they?) Maybe our blind passion for PC is the reason why we would rather ignore their weak points and think only of their incredible possibilities. A typical love story...

What is the Human Genome Project?

It's a multi-country 15-year effort begun in 1990 to discover the 60,000-80,000 human genes, to make them accessible for further biological study. Non-human organisms are being studied along the way to improve the technology and help interpret human gene function. Roughly four per cent of the human genome has been sequenced so far.

What will it achieve?

Genome biology and has given birth of a burgeoning biotechnology industry. Genes involved in various diseases will be found. Animal husbandry and evolution will be affected as knowledge of human genetics is fed back into animal production.

What are its potential benefits for people?

- Increasingly detailed genome maps have aided researchers seeking genes associated with dozens of genetic conditions, including myotonic dystrophy, fragile X syndrome, neurofibromatosis types one and two, Alzheimer's disease, and familial breast cancer.
- Rapid and more specific diagnostic tests. Novel therapeutic regimens based on new classes of drugs, gene therapy, and more specific environmental conditions that may trigger disease, and possible augmentation or even replacement of defective genes through gene therapy.
- Genomes of six microbes that live under extreme conditions of temperature and pressure have been sequenced. Learning what is unique their proteins may lead to microbes and their enzymes being used for waste control and cleaning up oil spills.
- Biotechnology. Sales of biotechnology products are projected to exceed \$20 billion by the year 2000. Genome project has already stimulated significant investment by large corporations of new biotechnology companies hoping to capitalise on the far-reaching implications of the research.
- Energy. Biotechnology will provide cleaner means for the bio-conversion of raw materials to refined products. Having the genomic sequences of the methane-producing microorganism *Methanococcus jannaschii*, could lead to the production of fuel-grade methane.

Save water
.... every
drop counts!

Euro to spawn a true transatlantic capital market

NEW YORK (AFP) — The euro's debut will create a virtual transatlantic money market, tempting Americans to invest in Europe and Europeans to adopt U.S.-type investment strategies.

"Eleven sub-scale capital markets will be consolidated into a single market as important as the dollar market. This leap in scale will accelerate the movement of European finance from a bank-centric model to a more dynamic market-centric model," said Kevin Mellyn, of Mercer Management, a U.S. consulting firm.

"Europe is waiting to explode. It is the U.S. in 1968. By the end of the decade, every European

will be invested in equities," predicted Tania Zoukine, chief investment officer of BatteryMarch Financial Management, a subsidiary of Legg Mason.

U.S. investors, starting to feel cramped in their domestic market but distrustful of the hazards of emerging markets, are waiting for the euro in order to increase their holdings in European stocks and bonds.

Even before the euro's arrival, their transactions in European Union (EU) stocks between 1985 and 1997 shot up from \$19.4 billion to \$740.4 billion a year. From 1988 to mid-1997, the assets of U.S. institutional investors soared from \$48 billion to

\$200 billion.

The euro will reinforce the trend as risks shrink, making for greater fluidity of transfers among the 11 countries that share the single currency, and creating a bond market, both public and private, 20 per cent larger than that of the United States.

At the same time, European investors are expected to change their habits and turn to investments in stocks and bonds, which can be more profitable than traditional savings.

In the bond market, U.S. brokerage house Salomon Smith Barney predicts a "secularisation of European savings" as happened in the United States.

Corporate and private debt will be transformed into negotiable stocks on markets with a choice of rates that vary according to risk.

"Asset-backed securities and corporate bonds should loom large on that menu of new opportunities, though it will take several years for that menu to build up," said Graham Bishop of Salomon Smith Barney.

But Kevin Mellyn predicted that "Europe is going to remain more hostile to markets than we do. But economics are going to rule."

Tania Zoukine added: "It is hard to think that U.S. companies can go to the French market to offer portfolio investments in English."

American Express, well-established in Europe, in January will offer products drawn up in euros to the French, the Germans and the British.

"We've had real high interest rates since the 70s and that has become a disincentive to invest in equities," said Zoukine.

But for companies as well as for states the ease with which capital flows from one country to another will force them to submit to market discipline as the national factor loses its importance.

"The existence of very large and liquid capital markets may well have profound political implications for the European Union."

Institutional investors — such as pension and life insurance funds — may neither be, nor feel themselves to be, restricted to securities offered by their own governments," said Graham Bishop.

He predicts the different states will compete among themselves and with a proliferation of neo-governmental issuers, such as regional administrations and companies, representing a new credit opportunity for the economy.

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- A bachelor degree in English Literature or any related major
- Minimum of 5 years experience

Technical Writer/Intellectual Property Assistant

- A bachelor degree in Business Administration, English Literature or any related major
- Minimum of 2 years experience

Candidates should be:

- Fluent in English and Arabic
 - Working experience with DOS, Windows 95 and Excel
- Applications will be dealt with in strict confidentiality

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Russian PM vows to get tough to boost economy

MOSCOW (R) — Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, taking the initiative while President Boris Yeltsin is sidelined by pneumonia, vowed on Wednesday to take tough measures to pull Russia out of its economic crisis and crack down on crime.

In televised remarks, Primakov stood firm in his drive to tighten state control of the economy after an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission left Moscow without agreement on the release of the next slice of a \$22.6 billion loan intended to help Russia through its crisis.

The IMF opposes strengthening the role of the state and fears Primakov is steering Russia away from liberal reforms.

The prime minister's comments on Wednesday contained no specific new proposals, simply repeating his calls for increased state intervention.

"In the economy we must of course foresee the strengthening of the state's regulatory role," Primakov, 69, said in televised comments at a meeting with officials from the Emergency Ministry and law-enforcement bodies.

"We cannot go any further just counting on market forces solving everything," Primakov also pledged to "toughen measures to combat crime and corruption."

"We will reject and prevent it," he said.

Concern has intensified

since the murder on Friday of Galina Starovoltova, a liberal politician and human rights activist who was buried in St. Petersburg on Tuesday. Many politicians blame Yeltsin for doing too little to fight crime.

The government is now trying to draw up its draft budget for 1999 but is having problems making calculations because it does not know how much foreign aid Russia is likely to receive.

The government, facing huge wage arrears and looming debt payments, wants the IMF to free a \$4.3 billion tranche of its \$22.6 billion loan as soon as possible. But the IMF mission left on Tuesday without saying when the money would be released.

Wednesday, 23-12-98

Exchange Rates

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	US DOLLAR	EURO	STERLING	FRANCO	MARK	YEN	SCANDINAVIAN	AFRICAN	ASIAN	AMERICAN	EUROPEAN	AFRICAN	ASIAN	AMERICAN	EUROPEAN
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1887	0.1527	1.8778	1.8389	0.1844	2.3475	0.2079	0.1844	2.3475	0.2079	0.1844	2.3475	0.2079	0.1844	2.3475
US DOLLAR	5.2883	1.0000	0.6558	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933
EURO	5.1893	0.9794	1.0000	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446
STERLING	0.5325	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
FRANCO	0.5438	0.1008	0.1008	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584	0.6584
MARK	5.1434	0.9708	0.9708	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999	0.7999
YEN	0.4290	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804	0.0804
SCANDINAVIAN	4.8145	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087	0.9087
AFRICAN	21.4831	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547	4.0547
ASIAN	1.4124	0.2886	0.2886	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523	2.8523
AMERICAN	0.8403	0.1586	0.1586	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119	1.6119
EUROPEAN	2.3509	0.4455	0.4455	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333	4.4333
AFRICAN	1.9258	0.3635	0.3635	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164	3.6164
ASIAN	7.9174	1.4943	1.4943	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675	14.9675
AMERICAN	1.6427	0.3100	0.3100	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846	3.0846
EUROPEAN	2.6812	0.5023	0.5023	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128	5.0128
AFRICAN	11.3121	2.1351	2.1351	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769	21.3769
ASIAN	23.3842	4.4135	4.4135	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318	44.1318
AMERICAN	48.7203	9.1965	9.1965	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887	91.9887
EUROPEAN	23.0004	4.3442	4.3442	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917	43.3917
AFRICAN	3.9546	0.7482	0.7482	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437	7.4437
ASIAN	2.6836	0.5065	0.5065	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384	5.0384
AMERICAN	11.7630	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713	19.7713
EUROPEAN	16.6144	3.1358	3.1358	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591	31.1591
AFRICAN	2.1829	0.4139	0.4139	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180	4.1180
ASIAN	1.3014	0.2267	0.2267	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559	2.2559

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	STERLING	FRANCO	MARK	YEN	SCANDINAVIAN	AFRICAN	ASIAN	AMERICAN	EUROPEAN
US DOLLAR	1.0000	0.6558	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933	0.6933
EURO	0.6558	1.0000	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446	0.7446
STERLING	0.6933	0.7446	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
FRANCO	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
MARK	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
YEN	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
SCANDINAVIAN	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
AFRICAN	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005
ASIAN	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005	0.1005
AMERICAN	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000	0.1005
EUROPEAN	0.6933	0.7446	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	0.1005	1.0000

WORLD STOCK MARKETS

STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST	CHANGE
FRANKFURT	DAX	4025.38	4025.38	44.45
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	10395.01	10395.01	189.78
LONDON	FT-100	3843.30	3843.30	-33.20
NEW YORK	DJ INDICES	9044.48	9044.48	54.91
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	574.73	574.73	1.07
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	555.35	555.35	1.23
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1202.57	1202.57	0.73
TOKYO	NIKKEI-225	13779.48	13779.48	-373.50
PARIS	CAC 40	3803.41	3803.41	17.05
FRANKFURT	COMMERZBANK	4562.60	4562.60	186.90

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

December 22) Another great day for shopping. They'll be practically giving stuff away, especially to you, because you know where to look. Before the holidays, you kept track of everything you liked but couldn't afford. Now you can go back and get it. Say you're going to exchange something. That's your excuse to get out of the house.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) Your partner

may have some rough words for you today. It's likely he or she is just telling you the truth, in a kind of awkward way, and thinks you can take it. Don't be angry or upset. Snapping back won't do any good, but listening will. Be compassionate and understanding, as you bite your tongue.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) You're so full of energy you can hardly sit still. You're in the mood to

do something wildly outrageous and demanding — scaling mountains, sailing a catamaran in storm surf. Or maybe you'll just brave the traffic to take things back to the mall. No problem. Today you've got energy and courage to spare. Take on a tough assignment.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Your sense of fun and your games, and commitment to friends, dominates everything. You'll enroll everybody else in playing, even the ones who are exhausted or grumpy or have other plans. You're so spontaneous and full of energy, you can get them all up off their couches.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Listen to your family today and you'll get some excellent advice. You're looking good right now, and drawing attention, whether you mean to or not. That's one reason so many people are offering helpful hints on how you should run your life. Be gracious and receptive and you'll learn a lot. Besides that, you'll make a fabulous impression.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You'll be able to figure out the answer to the puzzle before anyone else. You're usually in the top 10 in any kind of game, especially if it's a mental game. You generally are the first

one to get your homework handed in. Today, it's your ability to think quickly that gives you the edge.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) It looks like you're getting a bonus or something else of value, possibly the result of services you've provided for somebody else. You always fuss over others. Today, let people else fuss over you. They're not doing it quite the way you could, but that's OK. Give them a little slack. Nobody can do it quite as well as you can.

Birth Stone of December: Turquoise — Zircon

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Across Wintery
- 8 Broad, thick piece
- 10 Evaluate
- 14 Flirt's mother-in-law
- 15 Gray wolf
- 16 Hungarian river
- 17 Statesman and author?
- 20 So far
- 21 Northern sea bird
- 22 Forever in poetry
- 23 Words to live by
- 25 Actor Brynner
- 26 Actress and playwright?
- 33 Death rattles
- 34 Herbal quaff
- 35 Missile shelter
- 36 Asari
- 37 Have debris
- 40 Chemical suffix
- 42 Gore and Capp
- 43 Below, as sea
- 44 Lawyer: abbr.
- 47 Taylor of "The Nanny"
- 49 Post and author?
- 53 Director Spike
- 54 Uses a lasso
- 55 Christian minister
- 58 Signal
- 59 Mass gown
- 62 Singer and singer?
- 66 Claim on income
- 67 Drive the getaway car, e.g.
- 68 Silly fowl
- 70 Eliminates anger?
- 71 Proprietor

DOWN

- 1 Exclusively
- 2 Washed out
- 3 Cheer
- 4 Writer Tan
- 5 Covered up
- 6 Miss Marple, e.g.
- 7 Watch keeper
- 8 Shortened bk.
- 9 Hologram
- 10 Dials in used articles
- 11 Bacterial culture base
- 12 Neighbor of Ark.
- 13 "Das Lied von"
- 18 1894 economic pact
- 19 Needle case
- 23 Dancer Murray
- 24 Approximately
- 26 Expansive
- 27 Ahead of time
- 28 Computer language
- 29 Stephen of "The Crying Game"
- 30 Tropical vine
- 31 Post Glasgow
- 32 Olympic track coach

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Volume of shares issued in primary market registers sharp decline this year

**** DUE** TO low volume of shares issued by newly-established companies, the total of issuances at the primary market registered a steep decline. Compared to a JD93.4 million total during 1997, the volume at the primary market was around JD15.3 million in 1998.

When JD20.5 million of new share issuances by existing companies are taken into consideration, the total for the first ten months of this year rises to about JD35.9 million compared to JD33.6 million during 1997.

The total trading in the bonds market amounted to JD25.5 million during the first 10 months of this year. The volume was about JD0.5 million above the total recorded during the whole of 1997. It is expected that in light of the new

bond listings by three companies this year, the turnover in the bond market would exceed the JD3 million mark for the first time since 1996. According to the monthly statistical bulletin of the Amman Financial Market, the trading volume in bonds amounted to JD166,400 during last October. Of the amount, JD146,400 were development bonds.

The bulletin showed that the market value of all shares listed on the ordinary market until the end of last October amounted to JD3.64 million. The figure was the lowest level since January because of the decline in the share prices of banks during the month by about JD122 million. The drop in prices of industrial shares was more than JD62 million (Al Aswaq).

Study sees competition, finances as main problems in the construction sector

**** THE CONSTRUCTION** sector in the Kingdom suffers from a number of problems and constraints the most important of which is competition, a senior banker said in a study. He indicated that so many registered and non-registered contractors are in the market competing on a volume of work that, at best, does not exceed JD500,000 for each of them.

Mufleh Aqel, a regional executive director at the Arab Bank headquarters in Amman, pointed out in his study that the competition has reflected negatively on the profitability rates prevailing in the sector and has resulted in "lack of resources needed for growth and development in terms of technical, size and financial capabilities."

Another problem mentioned in the study was the huge financial requirement as a single project would require all sorts of bank

guarantees and working capital that are no less than 45 per cent of the value of the project. A JD15 million project would require financing up to JD6 million, Aqel said.

Aqel also saw administrative problems in the construction sector and noted that the historical development of the sector did not help create the necessary administrative requirements to manage large contracting companies and institutions. "This is not because of incapability or lack of qualified personnel but because of ownership considerations, the size of the market and its needs and the size of projects that can be obtained," he explained.

As for the technical sector, Aqel mentioned the lack of required resources to improve the qualifications of personnel and to train them especially to carry out large projects (Al Aswaq).

A.F.M. TRADE Wednesday, 23-12-98

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	212.850	210.000	-1.35%
INTL BK	1.540	1.530	-0.65%
THE OP JC	1.280	1.300	+0.15%
THE HOUSING BK	2.870	2.840	-1.1%
JO KOWAT BK	1.600	1.560	-2.50%
JO GULF BK	0.700	0.680	-2.86%
JO ISLAMIC BK	1.600	1.580	-1.25%
UNION BK	1.110	1.100	-0.90%
JO INVEST BK	1.450	1.400	-3.45%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.580	0.580	-1.75%
BANKS INDEX	274.650	274.000	-0.24%
INSURANCE			
ARABIAN SEAS INS	1.020	1.020	+2.94%
GENERAL ARABIAN INS	2.040	2.040	0.00%
GENERAL ARABIAN INS	1.330	1.350	+1.50%
INSURANCE INDEX	123.420	123.420	+0.28%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.460	1.460	0.00%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.600	0.600	0.00%
AL-RAY	1.110	1.100	-0.90%
ARAB INTL FOR INVEST & E	1.820	1.820	0.00%
UNION LAND DEV	0.560	0.540	-3.57%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.100	1.110	+0.91%
SERVICES INDEX	106.150	106.150	-0.19%
INDUSTRY			
AT-TANKEEP	1.100	1.100	0.00%
CEMENT	3.100	3.100	0.00%
PHOSPHATE	1.440	1.400	-2.78%
ARAB POTASH	3.000	2.850	-5.00%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.100	10.300	+1.98%
WORSTED MILLS	6.180	6.400	+3.56%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.540	2.550	+0.39%
CERAMIC IND	1.110	1.100	-0.90%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.270	1.170	-7.87%
ARAB CHEMICAL OILERS	7.100	7.100	0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	4.920	4.890	-0.61%
WIDEL EAST COMPLEX	0.550	0.540	-1.82%
JO STEEL	0.980	0.970	-1.02%
CHLORINE	1.250	1.240	-0.80%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.380	-5.00%
NTL IND	0.410	0.390	-4.88%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.340	0.320	-5.88%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE	0.360	1.000	+1.77%
ROCKWOOL	0.350	0.330	-5.71%
FOOD FACTORIES	1.000	1.000	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.450	0.440	-2.22%
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.610	-1.61%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.690	0.680	-1.45%
INDUSTRY INDEX	76.300	76.300	-1.62%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT Bk (75)	0.850	0.870	+1.16%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.390	0.410	+5.13%
JO. INTL INS	0.700	0.740	+5.71%
AL - GENERAL	0.790	0.750	-5.06%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.550	0.570	+3.64%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.370	0.370	0.00%
ARAB INTL TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIO	0.590	0.510	-13.56%
READY MIX CONCRETE	0.800	0.800	0.00%
NAMCO	0.270	0.270	0.00%
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0.250	0.250	0.00%
(MIDDLE EAST PHAR) 90	0.500	0.500	0.00%
UNION TOBACCO	2.550	2.600	+1.96%
AL-RAZI	0.530	0.520	-1.89%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.210	0.210	0.00%
INTL CERAMIC	0.380	0.380	0.00%
INTL TEXTILE MANU	0.190	0.190	0.00%
PEARL	0.480	0.480	0.00%
ARABIAN STEEL PIPES	3.830	4.010	+4.70%
ZARA	1.320	1.380	+4.55%
MUTRI DAR	0.690	0.690	0.00%
ARAB JO. INVEST	0.530	0.530	0.00%
GRAND INDEX	166.54	166.54	-1.16%

European defence companies move to create third biggest satellite group

PARIS (AFP) — Defence and aerospace groups GEC of Britain, Lagardere of France, Alenia of Italy and DASA of Germany announced Wednesday the creation of the world's third-biggest satellite company through the merger of space activities.

The deal, worth \$3.2 billion, also makes it Europe's biggest company in the sector. The agreement in principle had been announced in October, but the final signature was held up because of rumours that GEC was seeking to merge with British Aerospace (BAE).

The merger will take place in 1999, after vetting by EU regulatory authorities and a definitive agreement sealing the transaction, the companies said in a statement.

The joint company will be managed by a management board and will also have a supervisory board, with "all major decisions being taken in both contexts on the basis of a balanced partnership," the statement added.

The agreement signed Wednesday covered the conditions and the principal terms of the merger, subject to workforce approval and corresponding laws.

It concerns Lagardere and GEC's jointly-owned Matra Marconi Space, which has been negotiating a tie-up with DASA's space unit and Alenia Spazio for two years.

Annual revenues of the new company will be in excess of \$3.2 billion and it will have some 11,000 employees.

Business interests will cover scientific and observation satellites, telecommunications, navigation and multimedia satellite systems, launch vehicles and orbital

infrastructures. The move comes against the backdrop of talks among Europe's biggest defence and aerospace companies to form a pan-European group able to rival U.S. giants such as Lockheed Martin.

In a separate announcement, GEC and Finmeccanica, which owns Alenia, said they are to form a new joint venture, Alenia Marconi Systems for ground, naval and missile systems, and air traffic control. The deal was first announced in June.

The company is a 50:50 joint venture between the two companies.

Chief executive will be Ian King and chairman of the board Pier Francesco Guar-

guaglino. Both companies have contributed key operations and the new venture will have an estimated turnover of \$1.6 billion, they said.

It will be one of the three leading ground and naval radar suppliers in the world; a leading world supplier of air traffic management systems; the major supplier of missile systems outside the United States; an acknowledged leader in land and naval command and control systems; a leading supplier of simulation systems; and a worldwide provider of customer support and training services, they said.

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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There's more to be done than you thought. Each project leads to something else, and you wish you were four different people. That's not altogether impossible. An older person would be glad to help you out. Use his or her experience plus your energy and the two of you will wrap everything up with time to spare.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Your social calendar is so full today there's no way you can visit all those friends. Well, maybe you can find a way to bunch them altogether. How about having them come to visit you? That might work out well for more people than you realize. Call around and see who's willing to take you up on that offer.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) The action is fast and furious this morning, but you can change directions quickly and put in corrections. It'll help to have a list, or you'll waste a lot of time. You may also want to call ahead. If there's anything else you can think of to streamline your work day, definitely do it. Otherwise, you could work yourself into a frenzy.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You're looking good today, but some of the others have problems. You can be the problem solver. That's a job you do well. You're a natural healer and a calming influence, as long as you're not rattled. Don't go over the edge yourself. The people who are going into a tizzy certainly don't need you to do that too.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Money is a focal point again today. Your job is to track it and manage it wisely. You don't have much interest in this sort of thing. Why not get somebody else to help, a person who's really good at this? But don't stop paying attention to what's going on. That could be really expensive.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Somebody's talking about you behind your back, but don't worry. What's being said is nice, and maybe even encouraging. People care about you almost as much as you care about them. Did you realize that? Today it looks like they're trying to find ways to show it. Let them know their love is the most important thing for you.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) You're trying to be in the right place at the right time to get what you need next. You'll have to go on intuition and faith, as well as luck, but those should all work well for you. That little voice in your head that tells you what to do is right on target. Listen to it and you'll finish well before schedule.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) Love is everywhere around you. There's so much, you might not be able to see past it. You might not even notice its there. Its invisible, like water to a fish. Today, stop and notice, and thank a couple of people who have been providing it to you.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) A disruption is going on, possibly caused by your own insecurities. Isn't that silly? You're usually confident and easy-going, and that'll be the case once you get this little problem handled. A compassionate older woman can provide what you need, but don't expect her to just show up on your doorstep. You'll have to make the call.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You're getting more information today than you can handle. Keep most of it to yourself, even if you're excited. You don't want to ruin the surprise. Meanwhile, keep practicing a skill you're learning. You'll be good at this once you get it down, and that will happen much more quickly than you expected. Go ahead and let another hidden talent out.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) Things are going to turn out well. You just have to take it on faith. That's not easy for most Aquarians. You'd rather have scientific fact, but this isn't the kind of thing you can file or sort or run through your database. Its an attitude. Saying everything is going to be all right is part of what makes it happen.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Try not to get into a hassle with an older person today. Tempers could be a little short, and tensions could be running high. Instead of letting a minor difficulty ruin your whole day, find the humor in it. Everything that really has to get done will get done, or it won't, and life will go on. Relax.

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ARIES:

(March 21 to April 19)

Peace of mind is possible, but not when you're thinking about yourself. It comes when you're thinking of somebody else. Do that today and you'll realise later you've had a marvellous experience. Focus all your attention on others, and you'll receive a priceless gift in return. Keep travel to a minimum. Save it for the weekend.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20)

Looks like you'll have abundance beyond your wildest dreams today, not only in the form of gifts, but also friends. You could hear from people you haven't talked to in years. Besides that, all the planning you did ahead of time is working out. Things will go like clockwork, much to your delight, and much to your credit.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21)

Even though this is supposed to be a marvellous happy holiday, sometimes the tension gets a little thick. You have a great sense of humour. You can be the tension-cutter by staying light-hearted and cheerful, even if you don't feel that way. The most important gift you can give anybody today is your beautiful smile.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22)

Travel looks good for you today, especially if you go to visit an older person, such as your parents or an older relative. If you can't actually go in person, call on the phone as early as possible. Not only is this person waiting to hear from you, but you'll also be totally rejuvenated by talking to him or her.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22)

You could discover a huge legacy today. It could be financial, but it looks more

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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

like love. You may have felt pinched for funds over the last few days. Don't worry about it anymore. Today you'll realise that something you thought was important probably wasn't, and something you almost overlooked was the most valuable of all. **VIRGO:** (August 23 to September 22) The best gift you'll get today won't be found under a tree or in some fancy wrapped. Its going to be in the support you get from your mate or partner. If you don't have a one already, then be open to the possibility. There are so many indicators now that love is in the air, you can't get away from it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) Your job for today is to make sure there's plenty of everything. Watch what everybody's doing and try to figure out what they need. If you can get it to them before they ask, you get the prize. Part of the assignment is to be invisible, an unusual situation for you because you're usually the centre of attention. Today, turn that around.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) The usual advice is to finish chores early so you can relax later, but today that's not the way its going to go. Today, you're going to be playing most of the day. You don't have to deal with any chores until later, and with a little

planning,

you can probably put them off until tomorrow.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You might have a flash of panic, or as close to panic as a Sagittarius gets, so go over your list one more time, just to make sure. Then relax. A momentum built out of tradition, love and family will carry you over any rocky spots, so you won't even notice them. Neither will anybody else.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You're very intuitive today. You could have a couple of brilliant insights. Other people won't know how you knew, and you may not know, either. Actually, its the combination of a lucky guess and putting two and two together. But, its OK to let them think you have magical powers, too. All in good fun, of course.

AQUARIUS:

(January 20 to February 18)

You're going to make out like a bandit today. Everything you wanted is coming your way. Looks like you're receiving a bounty today that's so huge you can't even count it, and if you're looking in your pile of presents for it, give that up. You're looking in the wrong direction. Turn around, slowly, and you'll probably see it.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You're lucky today. You could find something you've always wanted at a price you can afford, or get a bonus you didn't expect. You care about others, and they care about you, too. Its obvious that you're generous, but today, be willing to accept somebody else's generosity. Don't look at the gift. Look at the love behind it.

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Official says he warned Samaranch of misconduct

LONDON (AP) — The former head of the Italian Olympic Committee says he alerted IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch eight months ago to unethical practices in the bidding for the games.

Mario Pescante, an IOC member and secretary general of the European association of Olympic committees, said he wrote to Samaranch last April expressing concern about irregularities in the election of Olympic host cities.

Pescante said he raised many of the same accusations which Swiss IOC official Marc Hodler made public 10 days ago, setting off the biggest ethics scandal in International Olympic Committee history.

In a telephone interview Tuesday with The Associated Press, Pescante said he cited a "crisis of my vocation as an IOC member" in his two-page letter to Samaranch.

Pescante said his letter included "precise accusations" of wrongdoing but gave no names.

"I spoke of some elements which move in Olympic circles and influence the vote," he said.

Samaranch did not respond to the letter, Pescante said.

"I did speak with him later and he said he was concerned (about the warnings)," Pescante said.

The Italian official said he and others had been aware that Salt Lake City offered scholarships to relatives of IOC members during the successful bid for the 2002 Winter Games.

Three separate investigations are underway into the scholarship fund,

which provided nearly \$400,000 in aid to 13 people, including six IOC relatives.

Pescante said scholarships have been used as inducements in the bidding process "for a long time."

He said Rome had been approached about offering scholarships during its unsuccessful bid for the 2004 Summer Games.

"I refused," he said. Pescante called for the IOC to establish a "code of ethics" for its members and for cities which bid for the games.

He questioned why Hodler had chosen to air his allegations to the world's media during the recent IOC executive board meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Hodler claimed that four agents, including an IOC member, have been active in promising to secure votes for payment in the election of host cities. He cited alleged payoffs of up to \$5 million and estimated that 5 to 7 percent of IOC members are open to bribes.

"We've known about these things for a long time," Pescante said. "It's strange that it's coming out now just before the vote."

He was referring to the decision next June on the host for the 2006 Winter Games. The Swiss town of Sion is considered the favorite, with the Italian city of Turin as its main rival.

"I find the timing strange," Pescante said. "Maybe you know which country Hodler is from."

Pescante, who was one of the main backers of Rome's 2004 bid, also

questioned why Hodler had not cited any irregularities in last year's vote awarding those games to Athens.

Pescante is one of four Italians on the IOC, having been appointed to the body in 1994.

He resigned as president of the Italian Olympic Committee two months ago following a scandal over the IOC-accredited drug-testing laboratory in Rome. The lab was shut down after allegations that some tests had been mishandled and covered up.

Pescante said he had resigned as a matter of principle and that he had been absolved of any responsibility in the doping scandal in separate investigations by a magistrate and the government. He said there was no reason why he should not keep his IOC membership.

Pescante criticized proposals, backed by Samaranch, to overhaul the procedure for selecting Olympic cities by taking the vote away from the full IOC assembly and allowing the executive board or other small group to decide.

"I am very offended by this," Pescante said. "This is very grave."

Why should I pay for the mistakes of others? If 10 per cent were doing wrong, you can't just strip the other 90 per cent of their power. You can't punish the whole assembly.

"And what will happen when the IOC elects a new president in 2001? Will that only be up to the executive board, too?"



Veteran Venezuelan challenger Jesus Rojas (L) gives his left on Japanese champion Satoshi Lida (R) during the WBA super-flyweight title bout in Nagoya, central Japan. Rojas defeated Lida with a unanimous decision to lift his second career world crown (AFP photo)

Hong Kong still betting, but recession cuts into track take

HONG KONG (AP) — Twice a week, 45 weeks a year, a fifth of the people in Hong Kong get caught up in the territory's sporting obsession — betting on horse races.

Nothing, not even recent race-fixing charges, dampens many fans' fervor for the sport.

Every time the horses break out of the gate at Happy Valley race course, or the newer track at Sha Tin, more than 1 million people either watch from the grandstands or tune in on television and radio, hoping they've backed a winner.

Yet while the bustle at Happy Valley is as loud as ever, lately the buzz has been deceptive. Asia's economic downturn has Hong Kong gamblers putting less money down on the ponies.

Like many of the bettors leaving an off-track betting shop, building painter Yip Yiu Kwong said he's being more cautious about how much he bets, generally putting down about 20 per cent less than he used to.

"Before, work was easy to find. I had more spare money," Yip said. He said he now bets a few hundred Hong Kong dollars (U.S. \$25 to U.S. \$40), trying to turn that modest sum into a small fortune by picking the top three finishers in a race.

As wagering tapers off, the Hong Kong Jockey Club is taking the blow, and that has wide implications for all of Hong Kong.

The club is a nonprofit organization that holds a monopoly on the racing business in Hong Kong but gives millions to the tax col-

lector and charity. Gamblers bet some 91.5 billion Hong Kong dollars (U.S. \$11.7 billion) on horse races last year, and the club's take of 17 billion (U.S. \$2.2 billion) went mostly to the government and to good causes.

This year, revenues are down 15 per cent. "The major factor is still the economy," said Wilson Cheng, information secretary at the club.

About 7.5 per cent of the government's tax revenue comes from betting, and a budget deficit already projected to run into the billions this year will be aggravated by the shortfall of racing money.

Racing suffered another blow Dec. 15 when authorities announced the arrest of 13 people, including former and current jockeys, for allegedly fixing races. One ex-jockey was sentenced to six months in jail after admitting he accepted bribes of 180,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$23,000) in exchange for rigging two races in 1996.

The scandal failed to deter the faithful, however. Betting dropped only moderately on the first racing day after the arrests.

The fall in revenues has raised questions about how much money will be going into the Jockey Club's charity fund, which funneled 2.2 billion Hong Kong dollars (U.S. \$284 million) to hospitals, schools and other community services last year.

The club says no donations will be cut for at least two years. Despite the recent slip in betting, Hong Kong racing

is the envy of many horse tracks around the world, Cheng said.

While tracks in the United States are struggling with slumping fan interest and competition from casinos, Cheng said the Jockey Club sees few people deserting the races for the casinos in nearby Macau or for the Hong Kong lottery, which the club also operates.

Even those who don't like horse racing itself join in the gambling frenzy.

"I'm not that crazy about horse racing," said Anderson Chan, a businessman who has never been to the track but has been betting on the horses for 25 years.

Horse races have been a part of life in Hong Kong since early British settlers introduced the sport in the mid-19th century.

The first races were run around the Chinese New Year, and the associated betting tapped a favorite Hong Kong pastime — gambling.

Although the races and lottery are now the only legal forms of gambling, smaller-scale betting on the traditional Chinese game mahjong is widespread.

Horse racing is king, though. It is for Hong Kong what baseball is to the United States or what soccer is to England.

"It's the national sport," said Lawrence Wadey, racing correspondent for the South China Morning Post, which is one of just two English-language dailies in a territory that boasts about 50 publications devoted to horse racing.

Broncos coach confident

DENVER (AP) — Through 11 games, they were the class of the National Football League, knocking off opponents with ease.

Through 13 games, despite sudden break-downs, they remained undefeated.

Now, the Denver Broncos have lost two straight games. Fans calling sports talk shows are panicking, and Broncos players are beginning to doubt themselves.

Not to worry, coach Mike Shanahan insisted on Tuesday, less than 24 hours after the Broncos' 31-21 loss to the Miami Dolphins.

The unflappable Shanahan said his team, which on Dec. 6 clinched homefield advantage throughout the playoffs, has momentarily lost its edge as it closes out the regular season with some meaningless games.

Monday night's game in Miami would have had huge implications if the Broncos had taken an unbeaten record into Pro Player Stadium. The Broncos would have had to get by the Dolphins in order to maintain their hopes for an undefeated season, duplicating a feat accomplished only by the 1972 Dolphins. Both present and former Dolphins didn't want that to happen.

But the Broncos stumbled the week before, suffering their first loss, 20-16 to the New York Giants.

That took much of the drama out of the game, with Miami, although the game was important to Miami's playoff hopes and pinned future Hall of Fame quarterback Dan Marino and John Elway.

Marino was marvelous, throwing for 355 yards and four touchdowns. But Elway and running back Terrell Davis, the NFL's leading rusher, both flopped. Elway completed only 13 of 36 passes for 151 yards and two interceptions, while Davis managed just 29 yards rushing on 16 carries, leaving him with 1,830 yards and one game remaining.

On Sunday at home against Seattle (8-7), Shanahan said Elway developed a strained hip flexor muscle during the game that limited his mobility, and Davis was slowed by bruised ribs — neither of which should bother either player next week.

But he made it clear that injuries weren't the cause of his team's latest loss.

"Dan made some great throws, and their receivers made some big plays in man coverage," Shanahan said. "Defensively, there were a number of times when we weren't in the right spot."

Offensively, we had some opportunities we didn't take advantage of."

It marked the fourth straight sub-par performance for a Broncos team that heretofore had appeared invincible.

NBA players might vote by secret ballot on contract

TORONTO (AP) — Kevin Willis of the Toronto Raptors defied his union leadership Tuesday and called for National Basketball Association players to vote by secret ballot in hopes of ending the lockout.

"The majority would vote for the owners' latest proposal, just to start playing ball again," Willis said, referring to the offer made last week by NBA commissioner David Stern.

The lockout began July 1 and the regular season, which was to begin Oct. 31, has been delayed until at least late January.

No new talks are scheduled, with Stern on vacation in Aspen, Colorado and union chief Billy Hunter in Oakland, California.

Tuesday marked the 10th day since the last round of bargaining, and players continue to lose \$50 million a week in salaries. If a deal isn't reached soon, the entire season will be scrapped. Stern has refused to say when it will be too late to save the season.

The league and the players are trying to determine how to divide about \$2 billion in annual revenue.

Steve Woods, Willis' agent and a professor of sports business at South Carolina, has an antagonistic relationship with the union. In October, he was escorted by security guards from a players' meeting in Las Vegas.

"I believe that a blind ballot would be acceptable," Woods said. "I think 80 per cent would accept it (the proposal), based on the 15 players I talk to on a regular basis. They would accept it and be ready to play tomorrow."

Union spokesman Dan Wasserman didn't agree.

"We conducted conference calls over the last two weeks with more than 120 players on each call," he said. "At least a dozen players on each call specifically told us they will wait for the negotiating committee to recommend a deal that is worthy of putting to a vote."

"Every player is entitled to his opinion, although we have not heard from Kevin Willis directly. But the vast majority of players support the authority of the negotiating committee to recommend a deal."

"A secret ballot is something the union is adamantly against because they would feel it would tear a hole in their blanket of unity," Woods said. "The players' union unity is based more on peer pressure and collective egos rather than on reasonable minds coming to a reasonable conclusion."

Jerome Stanley, an agent for Brian Shaw, Todd Day and other players, says his clients do not find the deal acceptable because it does not protect the interests of middle-class players.

"People misinterpret what this fight is about," Stanley said. "It's not about third-year players' ability to make \$20 million a year. The union has offered restraints on that. The union has also offered restraints on salary for rookies. The only thing the union is insisting on is to let the middle-class players share in the benefits of playing in the NBA."

In an effort to resolve the deadlock, the union has proposed mediation, but the league rejects such an approach.

Trainer looking for Tyson to recapture old style

NEW YORK (AP) — Trainer Tommy Brooks is looking for a return of the old Mike Tyson when the former heavyweight champion makes his comeback next month.

"In order for him to be successful again, to regain the title, we have to go back to the old style," Brooks said of Tyson (45-3 with 39 knock-outs), who has not fought since being disqualified for hitting Evander Holyfield's ears in their rematch in June 1997.

Tyson was banned by boxing for a year before having his license returned by the Nevada State Athletic Commission two months ago.

"We are looking to get that head movement, nonstop punching and stepping aside and around his opponent back," Brooks said during a conference call on Tuesday from

Scottsdale, Arizona, where Tyson is training for his Jan. 16 fight against South Africa's Francois Botha in Las Vegas.

Brooks joined Tyson's camp as head trainer seven weeks ago without any thought of remaking the man who once was the most feared heavyweight in the world.

"When you are a new trainer, what I've been concentrating on is not trying to change his style but working to get back to the Mike Tyson of old," Brooks said. "I was worried that I might not have enough time, but he showed me he was taking everything in that we were working on. He was putting his punches together in bunches and not trying to take him out in one punch. He was not squaring up."

Brooks was in Holyfield's corner for his two victories over Tyson. In

the rematch, Brooks remembers sensing Tyson's growing frustration before snapping and hitting Holyfield's ear to get disqualified in the third round.

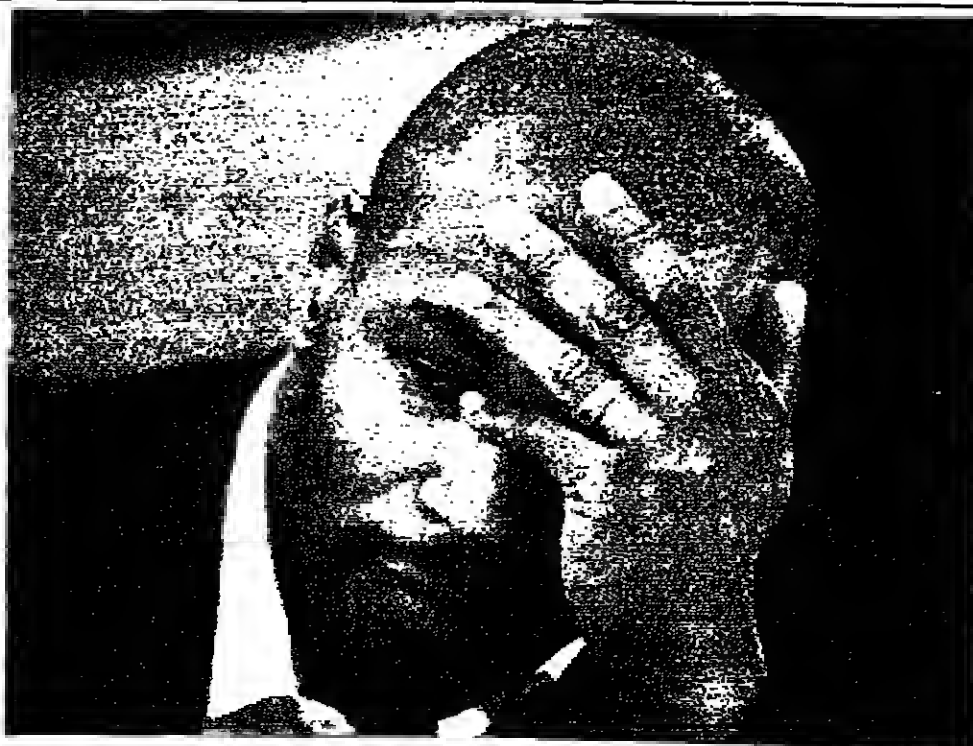
"The thing that happened to Mike was he wasn't in shape and he was getting hit by punches that he didn't think he could get hit by and he just lost it," Brooks said.

"He was going back to his corner and not getting any help."

He lost his confidence in his corner. They weren't telling him anything. He had no programme.

That won't happen this time.

"We've been doing our homework on this guy," Brooks said of Botha (39-1, with 24 KOs). "We are going to capitalise on what we can do best and just going to take it to him."



Mike Tyson

PARIS (AP) — Mike Tyson's comeback fight with Francois Botha was a must-see event for many fans. Tyson's return to the ring after a long hiatus was a major event in the boxing world. The fight was held in Las Vegas and was a highly anticipated event. Tyson's performance was impressive, and he was able to recapture some of his old style. The fight was a success for both Tyson and his trainer, Tommy Brooks.

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Nike gi' messa

EVERETT (AP) — In a move that could shake the sport, Nike is reportedly considering pulling out of the NBA. The company has been a major sponsor of the league for many years, and its decision to leave would have a significant impact on the sport. Nike's decision is based on a number of factors, including the league's financial situation and the company's own business strategy.

Elton upsets

LONDON (AP) — Rock star Elton John's decision to pull out of the Brit Awards was a major upset. The event was a highly anticipated one, and John's absence was a significant blow to the organizers. John's decision was based on a number of factors, including his own health and the league's financial situation. The event was a success for the organizers, but John's absence was a major disappointment.

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Hakkinen produces fairytale end to GP season

PARIS (AFP) — Mika Hakkinen's return from near-death to win the world driver's championship was a fairytale ending to the 1998 Grand Prix season that even Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone would not have dared dream up.

When an unconscious Hakkinen was pulled out of his wrecked Mercedes-McLaren at the Australian Grand Prix three years ago after a 270kph crash, few people considered he still had a future on the Grand Prix circus, never mind a shot at winning the title.

But Hakkinen defied the odds. He not only came back — he came back a better driver than before.

"I loved it. I didn't feel scared any more," said Hakkinen following his first drive after his crash.

Just how good he was was underlined in this season's crucial showdown with Ferrari's two-time world champion Michael Schumacher at the Nurburgring for the Luxembourg Grand Prix.

With only the final race of the season to come, the winner at one of the greatest Grand Prix circuits would have the edge ahead of the Japanese Grand Prix.

Both men had 80 points. Schumacher had been on a charge, taking the Hungarian and Italian Grand Prix while Hakkinen's star seemed to be on the wane after an explosive start to the season.

The Finn had only managed four points to Schumacher's 20 in the previous three races.

When Schumacher and his Northern Ireland partner Eddie Irvine took 1-2 in practice at the Nurburgring, Ferrari's late season surge to finally give the Italian team a new world champion was on the verge of succeeding.

But Hakkinen, starting third on the grid, produced the greatest race of his life.

In a flawless display of Grand Prix driving, the Flying Finn got in front of Schumacher during a refuelling stop and from then on led the race to the chequered flag — the hapless German unable to reel him in.

The win allowed Hakkinen to go to Japan with a crucial four-point lead.

Schumacher, who controversially lost the 1997 world championship when he tried to take out Jacques Villeneuve in the last race of the season, had to win if he was to have any chance of claiming his third title.

When the richest driver in the world stalled his car on the grid and was relegated to the back, the title was Hakkinen's.

It was at Spa in Belgium, though, that Schumacher really lost the title. In some of the worst conditions seen for years, the German, leading and with Hakkinen already out of the race, ploughed straight into the back of the Finn's teammate David Coulthard.

With a wheel ripped off, the Ferrari driver somehow got his car back to the pits. Jumping out, he stormed to the McLaren pits, ready to rip Coulthard's head off his shoulders, claiming that the Scotsman had slowed down on purpose in an attempt to kill him.

It was a ridiculous claim that even Irvine, a driver who has made his fair share of outrageous comments, denounced as nonsense.

Instead, most people blamed Schumacher for the accident. Why go flat out with visibility reduced to zero by the driving rain when you are so far ahead the race is yours? That was the question everyone was asking.

The consensus was that the German's arrogance had cost him dearly.

If the season was dominated by the Hakkinen v Schumacher duel, the lowly Jordan team, owned by Irishman Eddie Jordan, finally won their first Grand Prix when former world champion Damon Hill took the chequered flag at Spa.

When Hill finished in the points in Japan, the Jordan team were able to celebrate a fourth-place spot in the constructors' battle. For Jordan, the big-time had finally arrived.

For the Williams team, the 1998 season was a bitter pill to swallow. Only twelve months after Villeneuve had taken the drivers' championship, the Canadian was finding his Williams a pig to drive and the team counted top six finishes as a victory.

Suffering with Williams was the once powerful Benetton team — the final blow coming in finishing below Jordan in the constructors' race.

The season also saw the demise of the once all-conquering Tyrrell team. Short of money for years, Ken Tyrrell finally sold out to Craig Pollock and the new British American Racing team.

For Tyrrell, who with Formula One great Jackie Stewart ruled the roost in the 1970s, it was a sad end.

"I have loved every moment of it, but there is no room for sentiment in Formula One now," said Tyrrell.

But at least Hakkinen showed that good guys can win.

No rest for Ronaldo

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) — Ronaldo will not let the festive distractions of Rio affect his battle to get fit for the second half of the season following an injury-plagued five months.

Although back in Brazil to see friends and relatives for Christmas, Ronaldo has to follow a tough exercise programme to continue his rehabilitation from knee tendon problems.

Within 24 hours of arriving, Ronaldo spent much of Tuesday working out at a clinic where he has to spend at least three hours a day until he returns to Italy on December 28.

Since the World Cup, Ronaldo has played just 13 competitive matches, scoring five goals.

But he insisted he was now on the way back.

"I'm feeling good. These exercises are very tough but I am aware that each one is important," Ronaldo said.

Doctor Nilton Petrone, the specialist treating the star, said Ronaldo was winning his battle to get back to peak fitness.

"The results of the treatment are very positive and you could almost say Ronaldo has recovered," Petrone said.

Courier gets wildcard to Auckland Open

AUCKLAND (AP) — Former No.1-ranked Jim Courier has accepted a controversial wildcard into the Auckland Open tennis tournament, starting Jan. 11.

Courier is ranked No.76 and missed automatic entry by 10 places.

Tournament director Graham Pearce said Wednesday that Courier had been offered and accepted one of three wildcards for the tournament. Pearce had earlier said Courier was unlikely to get a wildcard because they are usually reserved for local players.

Despite Tennis New Zealand preferring the wildcard to go to New Zealanders, Pearce decided to ensure Courier could play in a draw headed by world No.2 and defending champion Marcelo Rios.

"Courier is a household name and one of the best players this decade," Pearce said. "To have him play in Auckland at the Heineken Open is an opportunity not to be missed and he'll be a huge draw card."

Courier has won both the Australian and French Open on two occasions.

Korda failed drugs test — ITF

SYDNEY (API) — Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda declared he was "not a drugs cheat" after being sanctioned for testing positive to a banned steroid at this year's Wimbledon Championships.

The 30-year-old Czech was stripped of the 1999 rankings points and U.S. \$94,529 prizemoney he earned by reaching the quarterfinals at Wimbledon this year.

Korda's argument that he did not know how the steroid nandrolone got into his system was accepted by the International Tennis Federation, which made the matter public Wednesday following the end of an appeal process.

The ITF's appeals committee, sitting on Dec. 22 in London, ruled that as Korda was unaware he had taken or been administered the banned substance, no further penalty would be imposed. Korda said in a statement that he was pleased with the appeals committee's finding.

"I wish to state categorically that I am not a drugs cheat and would never seek to obtain a competitive advantage over my fellow professionals by such means," Korda said. "I am delighted that the committee has vindicated me."

The appeals committee heard evidence from Korda, his representatives and the federation before making its ruling.

In his statement, Korda said he had been informed by the federation on Aug. 1 that he had tested positive to nandrolone and was issued with a notice of violation in October. He then lodged an appeal.

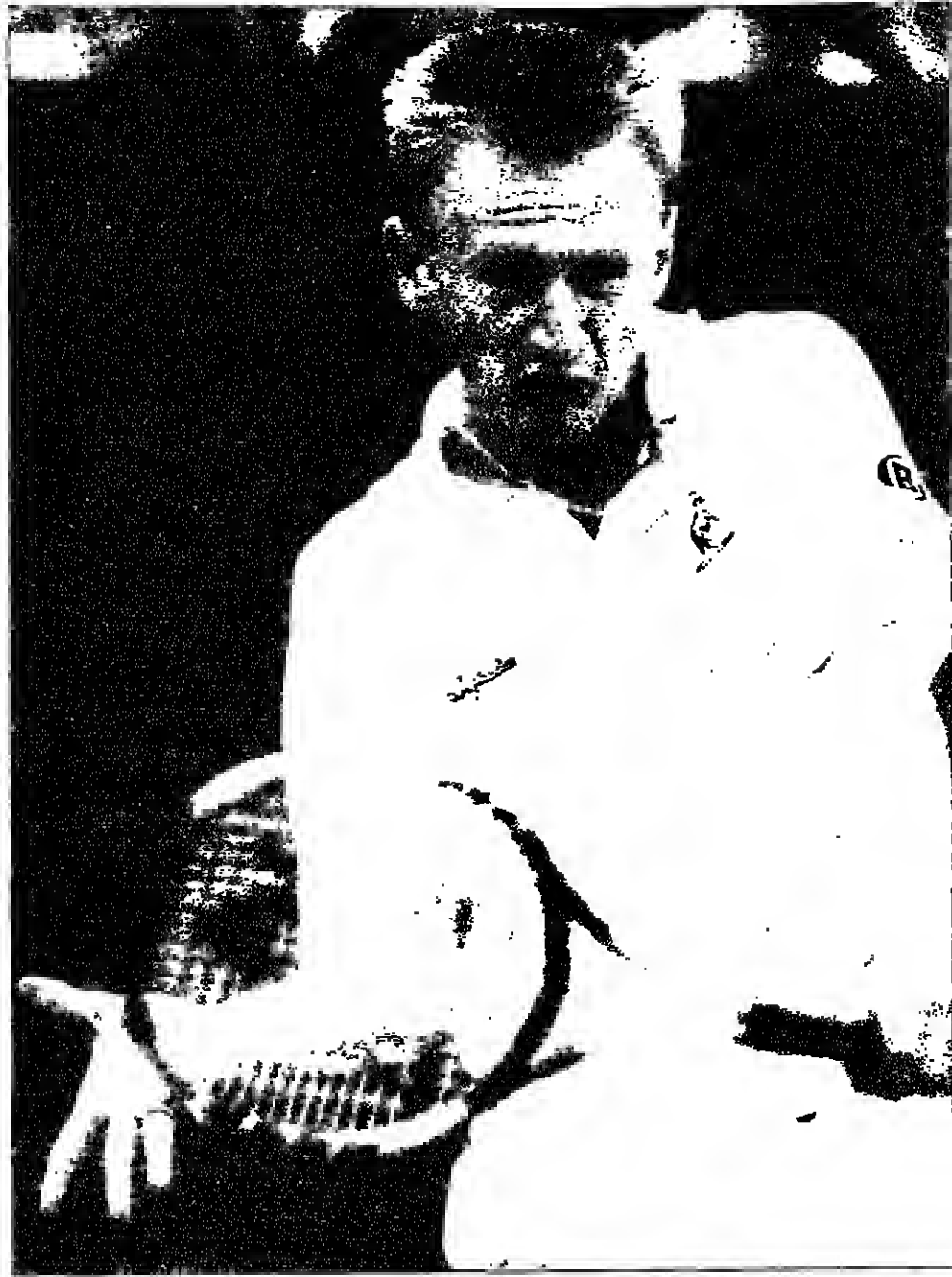
Korda said he and his advisers had made exhaustive, but unsuccessful, attempts to find the source of the illegal substance.

"This allegation came as a tremendous shock and caused considerable distress to me and my family," said Korda. "From a professional standpoint my performances since August suffered, as my recent results have shown."

"Whilst I am in the final stages of my career I still love the game. I am delighted that the committee has cleared my name and that I am free to carry on playing and competing."

Under ITF rules, Korda was found to have committed a doping offence, even though the federation was satisfied he had not taken the banned substance intentionally. Therefore, it was compelled to deduct the rankings points earned by Korda at Wimbledon and require him to return his prizemoney.

Korda broke through for his first Grand Slam title in February when he beat



Picture dated 29 June shows Czech Petr Korda returning a backhand during his fourth round match against Dutch John van Lottum at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships. Korda escaped a ban after failing a drugs test at the 1998 Wimbledon Championships, the International Tennis Federation Wednesday (AFP photo)

Marcelo Rios in the final of the Australian Open in Melbourne.

A spokeswoman for the event said Wednesday that Korda had passed a drugs test at that tournament.

"Petr Korda, the defending champion, was tested after he won the 1998 Australian Open men's final and the result was negative," she said in a statement.

The statement said players are randomly tested throughout the tournament, then all players involved in the singles from the quarterfinals onwards are tested.

Nandrolone boosts muscle development and reduces fatigue. A Kuwaiti weightlifter tested positive to the steroid at this month's Asian Games while Sri Lankan star sprinter Susanika Jayasinghe is under investigation by the IAAF after testing positive to the drug this year. Jayasinghe said she used the drug to control her menstrual cycle.

French studies showed 28 of that country's athletes across several sports tested positive to nandrolone in 1996.

Nike gives NBA stars a new message: No play, no pay

BEAVERTON, Oregon (AP) — Nike has a new message for its high-priced National Basketball Association players: No play, no pay.

Slumping sales and a lock-out due to a labour dispute have led the world's largest athletic shoe company to exercise its option to withhold quarterly endorsement payments to most of the 230 NBA players it has under contract.

"We are doing this because the lockout is hurting fans. It's hurting the sport, and it's hurting the value of our investments in the NBA," said Aaron Goodwin, an agent who represents Damon Stoudamire and Gary Payton, among others.

"I'm disappointed they made this decision," Goodwin said. "But I understand fully what they're doing. It's a business, and things like this happen."

Some agents have said

reassess its investment in the league.

"There is no way we'd threaten our relationship with the NBA or the many NBA players we're partnered with," Mooney said.

"But as a business, we have to make common sense, fiscally responsible decisions."

Some agents were surprised by Nike's decision.

"I believed they had every intention they would pay," said Aaron Goodwin, an agent who represents Damon Stoudamire and Gary Payton, among others.

"I'm disappointed they made this decision," Goodwin said.

"But I understand fully what they're doing. It's a business, and things like this happen."

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Nike should also withhold the money it pays the NBA to show it is impartial in the lockout, but the company had declined to confirm it was cutting back payments to the league until Tuesday.

"We've been taking these types of steps since July, when payments to the league were reduced," said Mooney, who refused to say which big-name players were included in the cuts.

Nike has a reputation for standing by the star athletes in its stable. For years, the fear was that it could not afford to alienate big names and have them defect to another company. Now, Nike and its competitors are re-examining the value of these big endorsement contracts and cutting back.

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Elton upsets British soccer establishment

LONDON (AP) — Rock star Sir Elton John stunned Britain's soccer establishment in a rare public outing as chairman of division one team Watford by describing Premier League players as lazy and overpaid.

The multi-millionaire entertainer dominated British sports headlines Wednesday after attending a press conference Tuesday with Watford manager and former England coach Graham Taylor.

Premiership prima donnas keep on breaking Elton John's heart, the broadcaster Daily Telegraph reported, while the Daily Express described John's comments as a "Rocket from the rocket man."

In John's first press conference at the Watford club in almost three years, he described the £18-million (\$30 million) transfer price tag on England striker Alan Shearer as "ridiculous for someone who hasn't found his form after coming back from injury and didn't play well at the World Cup."

calling out of control. People say the Premiership is the finest league in the world but you can't say that from results in Europe," he said.

Premier League spokesman Mike Lee said Wednesday that John was entitled to his opinion but was missing the true picture.

"No-one is suggesting that the Premiership is perfect, but there is much to be proud of and many countries around the world look at the Premier League with admiration and envy," he said.

"English football in general is in a very healthy state."

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THANK YOU, PARTNER

Each club holds South deals

NORTH
4 10 9 7 2
Q 4
A K Q 7
A K 5

WEST
A Q 6
A H
9 8 2
A Q 10 8 6 2

EAST
A K 5 4 3
7 4 8 3
8 5
A A 4 3

SOUTH
A 8
K 8 7 6 3 2
10 6 4
A 7

The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
Pass Pass 4: Pass
Pass

Opening lead: 7 of A

Lead defense requires cooperation between partners. Given an opportunity, the defenders were quick to wear the day on the lead. We do not like South's weak two heart opening bid on such a weak suit. At this vulnerability that action promises a suit of high quality. No time attaches to South for jumping to game. At worst, four hearts should have depended on finding West with the ace of clubs. West made an unlikely choice of opening lead. Declarer played his four dummies. East rose with the ace and shifted to a club. Declarer tried to rattle with the ace then lost a lot of time. Many declarers would naturally follow suit to this trick but West is on the ball. The defender rose with the ace of hearts and switched back to the queen of spades. Now it was East's turn to shut by overtaking partner's queen with the king and continuing with a spade. There was no way that declarer could prevent the defenders from collecting a second trump trick for down one. Either West would overruff with the ten or East's jack would be promoted to the setting trick. Had declarer ducked the first spade, the defenders would have had no reason to. When declarer later gains the lead, a trump to the queen and a trump back, ducked in hand, limits the losers to the three aces. It does not help West to rise with the ace of hearts there is no entry to the East hand for a trump promotion.

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Tender Notice

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Jordan Securities Commission (JSC) invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the supply, installation, full commissioning, and training for Phone Exchange System, Uninterruptible Power Supply System, and Computer Network Solution. The new solutions to be procured by the Jordan Securities Commission will be installed at the new premises (Hamzeh Building, encompassing Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) and Securities Depository Center (SDC)).

Two detailed tender documents identifying the requirements and specifications are available immediately for a non-refundable amount of thirty (30) Jordanian dinars per tender at the following address:

**Administration and Financial Department
Amman Financial Market
Housing Bank Complex, Sixth Floor
Shmeisani
Tel.: 560-7171**

The last date for submission of proposals is 12 noon, Thursday, January 5th, 1999.
Proposals are to be submitted to Administration and Finance Department, Amman Financial Market.
This notice forms an integral part of the Tender Documents.

'Washington will work to strengthen Iraqi opposition'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States will work to strengthen political opposition to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, national security adviser Samuel Berger said Wednesday.

"We will do all we can to strengthen the Iraqi opposition so we can seek change inside Iraq," Berger said, following four days of U.S.-led punishing air raids against Iraq.

"We will do that in a practical and effective way, step by step. If we are serious, we must do this carefully not

noisily. We will not play recklessly with the lives of those who risk their lives to oppose Saddam," Berger told the National Press Club here.

The United States will organize a meeting of opposition groups with senior U.S. administration officials early in the new year possibly in Washington, Berger elaborated.

And he held out the prospect that the United States would support a lifting of sanctions against Iraq if a new regime came to power.

The administration would

"work to ease economic sanctions against such a new Iraq as quickly as possible," he said.

The United States stood ready "to help a new government in Iraq that respects the rights of its people and meets its obligations to the world."

The option of complying with U.N. weapons inspections was still a possibility, he said, adding that chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler had drawn up a timetable that would take three to six months to complete.

But in the meantime, the U.S. policy would be one of containment, Berger said.

It would be a "difficult policy to sustain over the long term" as it would be "costly in economic and strategic terms."

But if Saddam began reconstituting his weapons programmes, the United States would "come" Berger warned.

"We have the obligation to do this, we have the will to do this, and we have the forces in the region," Berger warned.

Libya rejects U.S., British threats

CAIRO (AFP) — Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Al Montasser on Wednesday rejected U.S. and British threats to tighten sanctions if the two Libyan suspects in the Lockerbie bombing are not handed over for trial by the end of February.

"Libya does not bow down to threats," he said following a meeting here with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. "We are working on behalf of the interests of Libyan citizens and have already received a number of warnings in the past."

"We want a fair trial," Montasser added.

U.S. President Bill Clinton has ruled out negotiations with Tripoli on a U.S.-British offer to try the suspects in the Netherlands under Scottish law by Scottish judges and said tougher sanctions may be sought if Libya failed to turn over the suspects by the end of February.

The two Libyans are suspected of carrying out the Dec. 21, 1988 bombing of a Pan Am plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, which left 270 people dead.

Yalim Erez asked to form new government

ANKARA (AFP) — President Suleyman Demirel asked Yalim Erez, the minister of industry and commerce, on Wednesday to form a new government and end Turkey's month-long political crisis.

"I'm aware of the difficulty at hand and I will attempt to form a government parliament can accept," Erez said after meeting Demirel at the presidential palace.

If he succeeds, the 54-year-old Erez will become Turkey's first prime minister of Kurdish origin.

toppled Mesut Yilmaz for his alleged links with organized crime.

Erez played a central role in the creation in 1997 of Yilmaz's minority government, but his ambitions to become prime minister surfaced even before Yilmaz's ouster.

Said Erez: "If Turkey wants sweep away the financial crisis, if it wants to fight organized crime, if it wants social harmony, the country needs a powerful prime minister. I am such a man."

He may face opposition. Tansu Ciller, leader of the right-wing True Path party (DYP), said Wednesday that she was opposed to a bid to form a government by a member of the president's cabinet. Ciller said she should be premier.

Erez is a former businessman and was the president of the powerful Chamber of Commerce and Bourse Union (TOBB) before trying his hand in politics.

He was elected deputy of the southwestern city of Mugla in December 1995 on Ciller's ticket.

Three gendarmes killed in Algeria

ALGIERS (AFP) — Three gendarmes were killed and 19 injured this week in a security operation against Islamist fighters in the Zaccar mountains, west of Algiers, press reports said quoting hospital sources.

The attackers made off with medicine, food and bedding. A massacre took place in this region Dec. 8, killing 56 people in the town of Tadjena, the deadliest attack against civilians since January.

Le Quotidien d'Oran said it also believed 40 armed Islamists died in Monday's operation 120 kilometres west of Algiers.

Three of the injured gendarmes were struck in the head and taken to a neurological ward in a military hospital on the outskirts of the capital, the paper said.

Security forces used helicopters to bomb the fighters and the explosions were heard some 40 kilometres away, the paper added.

The operation was ordered after a mortar attack earlier in the day against a hospital for asthma sufferers. Nobody was hurt in this attack, as patients fled. The paper said

the attackers made off with medicine, food and bedding. A massacre took place in this region Dec. 8, killing 56 people in the town of Tadjena, the deadliest attack against civilians since January.

After a period of relative calm, violence in Algeria escalated in early December. Some 150 people were killed in the first fortnight of the month, giving rise to fears another bloody Ramadan, a Muslim fasting period deemed propitious for the jihad, or holy war.

Islamists began their uprising against the Algerian regime in January 1992 after the cancellation of general elections which the now-outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was set to win.

Since then, estimates of the number of lives lost in political violence have ranged from 30,000 to 100,000, most of them civilians.

Impeachment takes back seat as Clinton, America ready for holidays

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Impeachment took a backseat Wednesday, as President Bill Clinton delivered Christmas cheer to the homeless and lawmakers headed to their hometowns where Americans celebrated the boom economy with last-minute holiday shopping.

Capitol halls and the mammoth federal were emptied by the holiday exodus.

Across the country, many were looking forward to a white Christmas, watching American football and driving the economy with big holiday spending.

The stock market, unfazed by the historic impeachment vote, continued its upward climb Wednesday.

Clinton visited a Boys and Girls Club in Baltimore, Maryland where he announced \$1.12 billion in assistance for the homeless in his 2000 budget request, and he joined in holiday festivities at the children's charity.

"When times are good, we have a heavier responsibility to look at the long run, to meet the long-term challenges of the country and to give everybody a chance to be a part of what it is we celebrate," said Clinton.

In Washington too the mood belied the gravity the House of Representatives' vote Saturday making Clinton the first elected U.S. president to be impeached.

The White House was decked out for the nightly Christmas parties, hosted by the president and his wife Hillary, the

they found it unsurprising and they also found it unpleasant," he said, adding that few believe Clinton will actually be removed from office.

Kobut's polls showed Americans do care whether Clinton is removed or not, but he noted that while they approve of him overwhelmingly as a president, the majority say they don't like him as a person.

The only action on the impeachment front was behind the scenes, with White House aides and Senate members working the phones to discuss options.

Momentum, driven by the polls, has been gaining for censuring Clinton for his Monica Lewinsky affair to avoid a Senate trial which would begin shortly after Congress reconvenes January 6. The details were subject to intense bargaining but many were anxious to close the bitter chapter.

"Most senators, Democrats and Republicans, want to realize that this matter ought to get over with soon, that there's not the votes here to convict on impeachment, that there is a strong sentiment for censure," said Democratic

Senator Christopher Dodd.

"And if that's the case, why put the country through a trial which isn't going to result in a conviction?" he said on NBC television.

Former senate leader George Mitchell, of Northern Ireland peace process fame, has been tapped to lead the White House effort in those negotiations. He is currently leading an inquiry into alleged corruption in Salt Lake City's successful bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics.

The mood at the White House was far from grim despite the historic import of events and some anxious eyes on the impeachment process.

"There was some anger and frustration leading up to the vote that this was actually going to happen, but now some people just feel relieved," a White House official said on condition of anonymity.

"Now that we move out of the House, where it was so hither, so partisan and so unfair, now it's moving into the Senate where there is hope that it will be more fair," the official said.



MERRY CHRISTMAS: A woman on Wednesday passes by a downtown Amman shop offering various Christmas merchandise. Jordanian Christians celebrate Christmas on Friday (photo by Youssef Al 'Allan)

Netanyahu faces new ordeal as his party revolts

By Jean-Luc Renaudie
AFP

TEL AVIV — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was forced to call early elections this week after his ruling coalition fell apart, now faces a simmering revolt in his right-wing Likud Party.

Israeli radio reported Wednesday that Likud leaders have asked West Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert to run for the premiership, following popular ex-finance minister Dan Meridor's announcement Tuesday that he was quitting Likud to form a centrist party to challenge Netanyahu.

"We have the feeling that the party is on the verge of collapse and that it's never been through such a difficult period before," said Olmert, who until now has been one of "Bibi" Netanyahu's closest Likud allies.

The radio said Olmert has had discussions about forming an "anti-Bibi" alliance with Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who has taken pains in recent days to distance himself from Netanyahu.

Mordechai has refused to divulge any plans, saying only that he is "thinking seriously about his political career."

"We need another leader in order to save the party," said Communications Minister Limor Livnat, a hardliner and former Netanyahu ally who has reportedly been urging Olmert to stand for prime minister.

Uzi Landau, head of the parliament's defence and foreign affairs committees, is also said

to back an Olmert candidacy.

Other press reports said MP Benny Begin, son of former prime minister and Likud founder Menachem Begin, is himself planning to break ranks by forming a new party to the right of Likud.

Netanyahu "is like a general commanding an army without officers, because almost every Likud leader has turned his back to him," the Maariv newspaper said.

The prime minister on Wednesday denounced the challenges to his leadership, charging opponents with launching an "attempted putsch" and engaging in "a systematic campaign of calumny" against him that is motivated by "personal ambition."

But his blusterous ripostes notwithstanding, there is the unavoidable feeling within the party that Netanyahu has gone past his sell-by date as Likud gears up for next week's central committee meetings to begin selecting the party's candidate for the elections expected in late April.

Netanyahu is "the angel of destruction who has sabotaged Likud," said former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir.

In announcing his bid Tuesday to challenge Netanyahu, Meridor said the prime minister was "lacking credibility" and had become a national liability.

"Lying has become the norm. The country must be saved from Netanyahu with clear language and not saying everything and its opposite on the

same day or leading with a zigzag policy," Meridor said.

Netanyahu opponents were emboldened by Monday's events in parliament, which approved at first reading a bill calling for early elections as the government faced a no-confidence vote it was all but certain to lose.

He tried right up to the last minute to prevent approval of the bill issuing a last-ditch appeal to opposition Labour leader Ehud Barak to join a government of national unity.

But Barak rejected the offer, leaving Netanyahu in the odd situation of supporting the early elections he didn't want in order to avoid facing the no-confidence measure that would have toppled his government immediately.

Netanyahu's "extremist government" had reached the "end of the road," said Barak, who has his own sights set on the prime minister's office.

He may also face a challenge from centrist former army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, whom opinion polls say would trounce the prime minister in the balloting.

Commentators said Netanyahu would try to stage the elections as early as possible in an attempt to give his rivals as little time as possible to prepare for the campaign.

"I am certain of winning the next elections in the most convincing way," Netanyahu said after Monday's vote in parliament — though increasingly it seems the only person who believes that is himself.

FAA clears Santa for round-the-world flight

WASHINGTON (AFP) — In a tongue-in-cheek official statement, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said Tuesday it had cleared Santa Claus for his annual Christmas flight. In a statement issued here, the FAA said it had certified the reindeer-powered sleigh "Kringie One" for all-weather operations.

"The entire agency stands ready with its international partners to make sure Santa's flight is as safe and efficient as possible," said FAA Administrator Jane Garvey. The FAA said the sleigh is equipped with sophisticated features such as an in-flight de-icing system for polar routes, a Terrain Avoidance Warning System required for low altitude flights, and a special seat belt extension for the craft's rotund occupant.

Santa back in Cuba — to dismay of communists

HAVANA (AFP) — Santa Claus is making a comeback in Cuba following a decision to restore the Christmas holiday, but some communist militants say old St. Nick is really an agent of U.S. cultural imperialism.

A growing number of images of Santa and "Merry Christmas" banners are popping up in foreign currency stores run by state companies during this holiday season, the first in three decades Cuba has officially celebrated Christmas. Cubans wait out hard currency woes to find Father Christmas or other holiday paraphernalia in other state-run stores. Some hard-line communists have harshly criticised the imagery. It is a "deplorable ideological confusion," lamented the daily La Tribuna de La Habana.

Turkish St. Nicholas group incensed over Levis ad

ANKARA (AP) — A group that promotes St. Nicholas is incensed over an ad by the Turkish branch of U.S. clothing manufacturer Levi Strauss and Co. because it contends the publicity distorts the image of Santa. The half-page ad in daily Hurriyet last week showed a sad-looking Santa Claus sitting with his head bowed, with his sleigh parked and his reindeer, hanging their heads cut off, hanging on the wall. The ad, announcing cut-price Levi's goods for the holiday season, says Father Christmas will be made redundant this year because "there is no need to wait for gifts from anyone."

Hardened terrorists home for Christmas

LONDON (KUNA) — The gates of the Maze prison, outside Belfast, were being thrown open Wednesday to allow some of Northern Ireland's most hardened terrorists to return home to spend Christmas with their families, a prison service spokesman said. Up to 170 IRA men and pro-British paramilitaries are getting out, leaving fewer than 100 men in the top security jail for the next ten days.

Another 30, all Republicans, are being released in the Irish Republic.

More than immigrant

Volume 24

Jordan to observe holiday on Saturday

Plane with 14 passengers crashes

Iraq's TV channel comes back on

Yemenis can avoid army with \$20 fee

Levi Strauss

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